

Stop Trying so Hard!

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

A lot of us listen a great deal to the truths that God will bear our burdens and we keep thinking, "Well, that's right he does bear our burdens and sometime we ought really to give him our burdens." But yet, we never do really do it. And I know old John – I know John maybe better than Tom [young men who sang as Pastor mentions later], but I know that he has found that God really does bear the burden and really does carry it. And there comes a time when you have to stop saying, "Well, maybe he will and he's done it for Abraham, and he's done it for Moses, and he's done it for all the other fellows, but will he do it for me?" Maybe there's a time you ought to stop saying that and actually release it to him. And I think a lot of us are just playing along far, far too long.

We play it along with our futures. We feel, "Yeah, well maybe he can take care of my future," and yet we keep worrying about our future and we keep thinking that we have to make our own way through life somehow or another. Or, we think, "Yes he can take care of my reputation. I can trust him with it," but we never actually get that burden off our hearts. And I think a lot of us come Sunday after Sunday and we listen to the things about God, and we believe that they're all true in our heads. But loved ones, there comes a time when you actually have to take the burden off your shoulders and put it on God, and stop thinking about it, and stop worrying about it.

I think a lot of us are foolish about this. You wouldn't act with a lawyer this way. If you had a case and you presented it to him, you'd leave it with him. You wouldn't come back the next week and say, "No, I think I'll take care of it myself for a while," and then have a go for a week and then come back to him the next week and say, "Okay, you have a go I can't manage it." You know the fellow would tell you, "Look, you take care of it if you want, but you must leave it completely to me, or you must take it completely."

Now brothers and sisters, do you see it has to be that way. And you know the sense of liberty that some of you dear ones felt as the brothers sang. Some of it can just be emotional unless you're actually releasing your burden to God, and then there is a real sense of liberty and freedom. And so that kind of a song just gives us the release that we know we have already. But do you see you actually have to give the burden to Jesus? And if you don't do it, you can say you believe intellectually, but you're not trusting in your heart, you see.

And it was so with old Abraham, I mean, he could believe, "Oh yeah Lord, I believe I'll have children as the sand upon the sea shore. I believe it. I believe it." And his wife was 91 years of age and had no children and then he had to really decide, "Do I really believe or do I really not?" And you know, he tried it the way we do. For a while he hesitated on the whole business, and he went in to Hagar, you remember, his wife's maid, and he had a child by her. And then he got back onto it and he saw, "No, God will keep his promise with me." And you remember, God tested him on it and said, "Okay, I'll give you Isaac," and at 91 years of age old Sarah had a son.

And you remember what God said, "Okay, take Isaac your only son and sacrifice him on the altar." Now that was a moment when really Abraham had to determine whether he trusted God or not and it had to be action, you see.

Loved ones, it's no use this business of praying for the exams and then worrying about the exams. It's just no use. If you really trust God, then you put old Isaac on the altar and you leave him

there. And you trust that if you have to kill Isaac, God will raise him up for you.

And it's the same with our money; we really are not getting the benefits of the Father's success in managing money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but we're really not benefitting from all his possessions, because we sort of surrender our money to him and then when it begins to get tight and the rent begins to be due the old worry sets in again.

Now loved ones, do you see you cannot experience the freedom from your burdens unless you actually do let go of them. It's no use you saying, "Oh, God has to lift them off me." Loved ones, God will not force you into something. If you're bearing the burden about marriage on your shoulders and you're determined, "I'm going to marry whether he wants me to marry or not," or, "I'm going to marry this girl whether he wants me to marry her or not," then God can do nothing for you.

But it's essential loved ones, that you begin to take God at his word, you see. And that's what we mean by trusting him, by actually trusting him and putting Isaac on the altar, by actually trusting him for the money.

Really, oh we had a wild experience when we were first moving into some reality of the Holy Spirit. My wife and I pastored at Calvary Methodist Church which was in North Minneapolis and we were naïve little souls at that time, we didn't really know what we were doing.

I remember that we had this wild ex-Marine come and preached in the church, and he said "Okay, now we're going to have an offering and I don't want you to put in what you decided to put in before you came here, I want you to ask God about it." And you know, I had never heard of that deal before and I sort of felt in my pocket and my wife had the checkbook. So I began to pray very hard and it was the first time we had ever had the release – yeah, it cost us \$50 that night -- but it was the first time we had ever really entered into freedom as far as money was concerned.

And it was at that time, and my wife won't mind saying, because she and I had both pursued this intellectual approach to Christianity for years in the universities in Ireland and in England, and it was the first time really that she had gone out in trust that way. And it was that same time that God did a work in her heart.

Now, do you see that for years we had known all this, and we believed that God would take care, and we believed that God would look after money, but we never actually took a step and actually put it into his hands and trusted him with it?

And brothers and sisters, that's it: there is no release from burdens unless you actually take the step and put them into the Father's hands. And I'm with you; I think it takes some real mental discipline. I know as it comes up towards the examination time, I know that Satan is worrying you and worrying you and saying, "Look, what about the consequences? What about the grades? What will happen if you are thrown out of school?" But loved ones, it's there that you exercise faith you see.

Faith is not just a feeling; it's a belief that God will take your burdens if you put them on his shoulders. And that's what justifies you in His sight. It's not making a success of your lives. It isn't loved ones. It isn't even living morally that pleases God. It is the fact that you trust him with the things that are concerning you and binding you uptight. You know if I asked you this morning, "Well are you uptight this morning?" Well, some of you are. You're uptight about all

kinds of silly things that Satan has persuaded you are vital to your welfare. And loved ones, do you know that 15 years hence you'll have forgotten those things but you'll be uptight about half a dozen other things?

Now, do you see that we don't need it? Brothers and sisters, we don't need it. There's someone who put this world here. There's someone who gets that sun up out of the horizon every day. There's somebody who keeps the galaxies going in the right order. There's someone who keeps the thing from crashing. We call it law of gravity but you know we're bluffing our way. We give it a name, we've explained nothing. We can't explain why it occurs. We can't explain why the atoms hold together. We can explain partly how they hold together, we can't explain why. Do you see that there is some being behind the whole thing that made you and put you here and he didn't put you here to make your own miserable way on your own? He just didn't. It's just silliness you see. It's just silly.

It's like that old fellow, he was driving the old horse and cart along the road and he had his little dog beside him. And the old donkey, you remember, was just striving up the hill and could hardly make it. And then the old fellow lifted the dog onto his lap and held him there. And someone watching him said, "What did you do that for?" And he said, "Oh, I didn't want the poor old donkey to have to carry us both." Well, do you see that some of us are like that? Some of us are saying, "Well, we don't want God to have to carry this too; he has enough."

Loved ones, he is carrying you. It's the Father that sustains your life. It's the Father that keeps the oxygen flowing through your body. It's God who controls your life and who keeps the earth on which you're resting spinning. Now he's carrying the whole burden anyway and you're only pretending that you're carrying it. God is able to carry it.

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And that's the kind of thing, you remember, that we talked about last day. And maybe it would be good to look just at the promises here, because sometimes they spell out our faith more than all kinds of examples. Do you see it there in Romans 4:3, "For what does the scripture say?" And then Paul quotes it, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." And Abraham's trust in God was looked upon by God as if it were righteousness.

Now, you remember, where that occurred. 2000 years BC it was, and you might want to look at that. It's in Genesis 15:5, "And he," God, "brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." And so even though you see in Verse 3, "Abram said, 'Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.'" Even though that was the situation physically speaking, yet God said that he would have children, and he would have descendants beyond the number of the stars. And Abraham trusted God for that, and God looked upon that as righteousness.

The amazing thing about that was really, that Abraham wasn't a righteous person at all, you see. He was in fact, just a cowardly liar. If you look at Genesis 12, he really was, really. Genesis 12:10, he was prepared to lie up and down in order to get out of difficulties. You see, I think we end up doing that. Loved ones, you're not made to live life on your own. You're not made to bear all the burdens on your own and the only way actually we can manage to bear them is by lying, isn't it? I mean, we're deceiving. We don't get an assignment in, so we make what we call an excuse. It's not an excuse it's a lie. We fail an appointment and we make an excuse. It's not an excuse

it's a lie.

Without God bearing our burdens and carrying us we're always driven into this kind of compromised situation that Abraham was. Genesis 12:10, "Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, 'I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.'" Now that was Abraham's attitude to life, and he really was not a righteous person himself. And yet, do you see that because the underlying basic attitude of his life to God was one of trust, God counted his trust in place of righteousness. Now really that's what the Father wants with you and me.

A lot of us are feeling, "Well, I have to straighten up my life first." Loved ones, God is saying, "Look, if you start trusting me, if you'd start trusting me to give you all you need in your life then you could begin to find that my Holy Spirit would straighten up your life." But a lot of us are saying, "No, we must be moral. We must be moral. We must obey everything before God will deal with us." Loved ones, God takes you as you are and then he works on your morality. But you must take the first step of trusting him.

Now what have you to trust him to do? Well, trust him to give you his own life. You have mental life this morning. You have emotional life. You have physical life. But God has an uncreated spiritual life that he can give to you miraculously this morning, and it's the life that makes everything come together. It's the life that makes all the other lives work right. If you say to me, "What is it?" It seems it's a kind of invisible electric dynamic that God gives to you. He called it different things in the Old Testament. At one time it turned out as water. When the Israelites were dying of water, this life of God became water to them. At another time they were dying of starvation in the wilderness and this life became manna that was found on the ground every morning, and they ate it like bread. At another time this life became healing to some of them. But this life Jesus talked about is the Holy Spirit. He said, "My Father will give you his own spiritual uncreated life and that will enable you to do whatever you need in this life. It will meet all your needs."

Now that's what you've to trust God to do, to give you that life. We don't deserve it you see. We don't deserve it at all, because God, you remember, wants to put a flaming sword at the gate of the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life and he said, "Look, you people have given up any right to receive this spiritual uncreated life from me. From now on I condemn you to absolute destruction." And you remember that that is our real position. And the only reason God can give us this life again without condoning cowardly liars is because Jesus has paid our debt to God's unbending law of justice. And because of that God is able to come out to us again this morning and say, "Look, I'll give you this life if you'll trust me to give it to you."

And of course, most of us don't work that way at all. Most of us work the way – well, it's the first verse that we could look at just this morning Romans 4:4, "Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due." I think a lot of us are in that position. A lot of us know that our lives are not satisfying. We know we don't feel much significance in life. We're really troubled about what the meaning of our lives is and we're troubled that nobody seems to think much of us, and we're troubled that we don't feel any approval of the great Creator of the universe upon our lives. And we begin to work at it. We work at it! And a lot of us spend our time working at

it. We're always trying to work at it, and striving and straining to try to prove that we're good, or that we're moral, or that we're spirit filled Christians, or that we're good people, or that we're worth looking at. And really, many of us are in that position where 'we're working'.

Now, do you see that when you're working like that to try to prove to God, and morality, and all your peers that you're right, you're bound to fail? You're bound to futility, because you're trying to prove that you're right by works of the law. And it just isn't possible to prove yourself right that way. I'll tell you why, if you'd like to look at it. It's in James and I think a lot of us are involved in this. We're trying to prove that we're socially responsible, or we're trying to prove that we really care about people, or we're trying to justify to ourselves that we're really going to contribute something to the world, or we're trying to prove that, "Well we obey some of the laws." And we're in this position in James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."

In other words, even if you spent 50 million hours, obeying all kinds of good things that you thought you ought to do, and living up to all kinds of high standards; even if you failed in one point, it's like disobeying the whole law. And that's the difficulty about trying to justify yourself by doing works of law, you see. I mean, dear ones, they are not only the works of law detailed in the Bible, some of us live under the works of law that our parents have given to us. Some of us have ideas that our parents gave to us, and we're trying to live up to those ideas all the time and prove ourselves, and justify ourselves, because we do that. Some of us have standards for ourselves that are not fair standards at all. Sometimes they are not high enough, sometimes they're too low. But we're trying to prove ourselves by living up to those standards. The psychologists love to call them goals. We always have goals in life, and we all try to keep striving to those goals. And the Bible says that you've only to fail in one point and you've failed in the whole lot.

You see in Verse 11, "For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' said also, 'Do not kill.' If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law." In other words, if you try to prove yourself by obeying works of the law you have to obey the whole lot. You have to do everything! And it's so with those standards that your parents have given to you. You have to keep living up to all of them all the time otherwise you'll never feel justified. And do you see loved ones, it's impossible ever to justify yourself in God's eyes by that means? Particularly in his eyes, because he didn't give the law so that we would try to live up to it.

Why did he give it? It's in Romans there if you look at it. And why can we never justify ourselves in God's eyes by living up to all the law? Romans 3:20, "For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." It is because the law is a diagnostic instrument. God said, "Look, if you had my Holy Spirit in your life you would have no other gods before me. You would not commit adultery. You would not bear false witness. Now, this is a diagnostic instrument. If you do these things it proves that you haven't the life of my Holy Spirit."

Now do you see that when we take that diagnostic instrument and try to use it to prove that we can be like him without his Holy Spirit, do you see that we're compounding our rebellion against God? The law is not given by God so we can try to live up to it by our own strength. The law is given by God to expose to us that we have not trusted him for his Holy Spirit and therefore we are not living up to the standards that the Holy Spirit brings to our normal life.

So loved ones, when we say, “Oh yeah, we live by the golden rule. I live by the golden rule.” Do you see that first of all we can't live by the golden rule? None of us who say that are actually living by it. And secondly, it wouldn't matter if you lived up to the golden rule if you're living it independent of the Spirit of God's life then you're rebelling against him anyway. All it is, is you're a moral sinner. And really, there are lots of dignified moral sinners among us who are really most moral people, but they do it all without God. And they have no sense of dependence upon him.

Now it's that that is God's controversy with us and that's why you see it says in Romans 4:4 there, “To one who works, his wages are reckoned as his due.” And then it goes onto the situation that Abraham was in in Verse 5, “And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” So really what God is trying to say to you this morning is, “Would you stop striving? Would you stop straining? Would you stop trying? Would you stop trying to be the kind of person that you think you should be? And would you start looking upon me as your dear Father who is willing to give you my own life, my own 'Holy Spirit life', if you will only trust me to give it to you?” And he's saying, “Would you stop working so hard? And I tell you, if you would trust me to give you this life I will look upon your trust as if it were righteousness. And even though it's just trust, because I know through that trust you're going to receive my Holy Spirit who is going to make you like me, I will immediately lift the guilt off your conscience and I will accept you as my own children -- even though you're not perfect yet. Even though you aren't like me in every degree, yet because you're trusting me I will count that trust or that faith in place of righteousness; and I will look upon you as if you were as righteous as my own Son Jesus.”

Now that's what God is willing to do this morning, brothers and sisters. God is willing to impute the righteousness of Jesus to you, if you will trust him. And the old Greek participle is the present participle. It means, if you're trusting him now, God counts that present trust as righteousness. Now, that's all you have to do, really. You don't have to start cleaning up your life now, this morning. You need to say, “Father, I have been living independent of you. I've been working at this. I've been trying to prove myself to everybody. But Father, I do believe that you are my father and I do believe that I can trust you with my burdens, and I can trust you to give me your Holy Spirit. And Father, I will receive that Spirit of Jesus now into me and I trust you then to look upon me as righteous. And I trust you by your Holy Spirit to make me righteous as the days pass.”

But that's the way it works brothers and sisters. It's glorious. I mean, it works backwards because we were in an impossible position before you see, you couldn't be good without the Holy Spirit and you couldn't receive the Holy Spirit unless you were good. It was an impossible dilemma. And now God says, “If you trust me to give you the Holy Spirit because of Jesus dying in your place, then I will give you the Holy Spirit as you are now, today. And then when you have him all you have to do is begin to submit to him and obey him and he'll make you like me.”

But brothers and sisters that's why it can change right this morning, and why it's important that you actually take the burden off and you lay it on God, you see. And if you're worrying, if you're worrying this morning about the money, or if you're worrying this morning about that relationship with that professor, or if you're worrying this morning about that kind of grind that you have there with your roommate, do you see that God is saying to you, “Look, will you trust me with that? Will you trust me to give you my Holy Spirit of life who will sort that out? And if you do, I will regard your trust as righteousness and you'll be my child.” And that's why it can take place so suddenly, you see.

But it does demand -- and brothers I say it to you because we seem expert at this -- it does demand that we stop trying to do it ourselves. It does demand that we stop trying to prove ourselves to the whole wide world, and stop trying to achieve all these great things that we think we ought to achieve, and instead say, "Father, I'm willing to take my place in your world, the place you want me to have. And I trust you now to give me the Holy Spirit." And do you see that faith in the New Testament sense is not just belief, it is John 1:12, "To as many as receive him to them gives he the right to become the children of God."

You actually have to receive the Spirit of Jesus this morning into yourself. In other words, it's not enough to say, "God, I'll believe I have the Holy Spirit when I feel I have the Holy Spirit." God is saying, "No, you have to believe by faith. I said I'll give him to you. Now, he isn't in you until you believe he is in you." Do you see that?

The Spirit of Jesus cannot come into you until you believe that he is coming into you. It's no use standing back saying, "I'll believe he has come into me when I feel him inside me." He will never be in you unless you exercise faith, because Jesus comes into you through faith. And what is faith? Faith is believing that God will keep his promise and adjusting your life to make room for that promise. That's what it is.

So faith this morning would say, "Father, I believe that you can give me the Spirit of your Son into my spirit and you can change my life. And I am now willing to make all the adjustments and arrangements in my life that may be necessary because of that." And that's what governs God's life coming into you this morning. If you only believe but aren't prepared to make the necessary adjustments in your own life for that, then you're like Abraham saying, "I believe that you'll restore Isaac but I'm not going to risk it. I'm not going to kill him." But really, we need to say, "I believe you will give me your Spirit of life and I am prepared to make what necessary adjustments are necessary."

Now brothers and sisters would you -- you see it's a very down to earth sensible transaction. It's just good common sense. Now if you're sitting there and you're saying, "Well Pastor, I'd love it to be real to me, but I've tried it 20 times before." Loved ones, do you see that it works if it's belief plus obedience, if it's belief plus adjusting the life to make room for the Holy Spirit. But if you're sitting there saying, "Father, I really need you with the finances, but my relationship with the girlfriend -- I'd like to control that myself." Do you see the Spirit of Jesus cannot come into you to be a prisoner? Or sisters, if you're saying, "Well I'd really like him in me for the business of my relationship with my roommate. But I'd like to just control what I wear myself; I don't want him to bother with that." Then do you see the Spirit of Jesus cannot come into you unless you're willing to trust him in every area of your life and make all the adjustments that are necessary?

I think dear ones, with many of us in our generation -- I think a lot of our problems in this area are just in the problems of relationships between men and women. And I think many of you brothers and sisters are having real trouble 'really' receiving the Spirit of God into you because you won't come down the line on that issue. And I agree with you, it's because they persuaded us that so much is necessary. They persuaded us that we're not healthy unless we engage in so much of this. But loved ones, believe me God knows the way it should work, and has a perfect and a beautiful way for us to live our lives together. And if you are willing really to surrender that whole thing over to God, he will give you his Holy Spirit this morning, and he'll count your trust, or your faith in

place of righteousness.

Then there's no longer that old hassle, "Boy, I'm trying to please God. I'm trying to be good enough for him to accept me." You're only good enough to accept him when you accept that you're impossibly bad, and you can never please him on your own, and just cannot deal without his life. So that's why the Bible says that you're not to work because if you work, then your wages come to you as a due, and they're never enough. But if you believe him who justifies the ungodly, then your faith is counted as righteousness. And it can happen today.

So would you really seriously think about it during the next few minutes? I think it's madness to keep coming on Sunday mornings and believing that it would be true if I did something. I think sooner or later you have to act. Really, and let it be true, and let the burdens come off.

Let us pray.