

God Will Help You

MAX LUCADO
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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

God Will Help You

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Text from the following appears in this book: *Anxious for Nothing, You Are Never Alone, Fearless, Jesus, and How Happiness Happens*.

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ISBN 978-1-4002-2440-1 (audiobook)

ISBN 978-1-4002-2441-8 (eBook)

ISBN 978-1-4002-2439-5 (HC)

Printed in China

20 21 22 23 24 GRI 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

He's the old guy in the Louisville Cardinal marching band. You can't miss him. Everyone else is college age; he's middle-aged. Everyone else wears a band uniform; he wears a windbreaker and wool cap. Everyone else plays an instrument. Patrick John Hughes pushes a wheelchair. The wheelchair contains his son, Patrick Henry Hughes, a blind, disabled musical genius.

Young Patrick was born on March 10, 1988. The moment he entered the world, good news became bad news. Doctors quickly discovered that his arms and legs wouldn't straighten. And his eyes? He didn't have any.

The older Patrick was shell-shocked. He'd dreamed of raising a son. He planned to turn his backyard into a baseball field. He envisioned happy hours of running bases, catching pop flies. But now? His son later wrote these words: "On the day I was born, you might say I arrived carrying a

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bag of lemons . . . I think [my family] would have preferred oranges . . . But you can't turn lemons into oranges, no matter how hard you try. Mom and Dad taught me, you have to hang in there. And once you do, you discover that lemons are pretty cool.”¹

Patrick's parents hung in there, all right.

The father noticed he could calm his infant son by placing him on top of the piano and playing it. The music connected. By nine months, young Patrick was tapping the keys. At the age of two, he was playing requests. In elementary school he played concerts. In high school, he was all-state band and chorus. He graduated with a 3.0 GPA.

By the time he arrived at the University of Louisville, his piano and trumpet skills were well-known. The band director invited him to join the marching band. Wheelchair in a half-time show?

They rigged a special wheelchair with bigger, wider wheels. The teenager and the dad gave it a go at summer band camp: twelve-hour days of ducking tubas and dashing to the right spot without wiping out the entire wind section.

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“He hasn’t dumped me yet,” grinned the boy.

And it appears he never will. Every school day, the father pushed his son to class and sat near him during lectures. He whispered any lessons written on the blackboard. Then, while the rest of the family went to bed, the father left to work the graveyard shift. He would get home at 6 a.m., sleep a few hours, and start it all over again. But this father never complains. “We still say ‘why us?’” says the father, “but now it’s ‘why us? How’d we get so lucky?’”²

If their story sounds familiar, it should. That’s you and me in the wheelchair, struggling with our limitations. That’s you and me in the dark, unable to see a step into the future.

Yet, that force we feel, that guiding hand? God behind us. He shoves, he pulls, he guides, he turns. He can spin us on a dime and has been known to pop a wheelie or two. But he’ll never dump us out. Our Father leads us with a sure hand. “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

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Do you have concerns about tomorrow? God doesn't, and he is here to help you.

Are you weary from the struggle? God isn't, and he is here to help you.

Does anxiety steal your sleep? God has comfort and he is here to help you.

No matter the challenge or the question, by God's grace you can face it. He is up to the task. And he will help you.

CHAPTER 1

*God Will Help
You When You
Feel Anxious*

Chances are you or someone you know seriously struggles with anxiety. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety disorders are reaching epidemic proportions. In a given year, nearly fifty million Americans will feel the effects of a panic attack, phobias, or other anxiety disorders. Our chests will tighten. We'll feel dizzy and light-headed. We'll fear crowds and avoid people. Anxiety disorders in the United States are the “number one mental health problem among . . . women and are second only to alcohol and drug abuse among men.”¹ “The United States is now the most anxious nation in the world.”² (Congratulations to us!)

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* cited a study that indicates an exponential increase in depression. People of each generation in the twentieth century “were

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three times more likely to experience depression” than people of the preceding generation.³

How can this be? Our cars are safer than ever. We regulate food and water and electricity. Though gangs still prowl our streets, most Americans do not live under the danger of imminent attack. Yet if worry were an Olympic event, we’d win the gold medal! Citizens in other countries ironically

enjoy more tranquility. They experience one-fifth the anxiety levels of Americans, despite having fewer of the basic life necessities.⁴

If worry were an Olympic event, we’d win the gold medal!

Our college kids are feeling it as well. In a study that involved more than two hundred thousand incoming freshmen, “students reported

all-time lows in overall mental health and emotional stability.”⁵ As psychologist Robert Leahy points out, “The average child today exhibits the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s.”⁶

We are tense.

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Why? What is the cause of our anxiety?

Change, for one thing. Researchers speculate that the Western world's "environment and social order have changed more in the last thirty years than they have in the previous three hundred"!⁷ Think what has changed. Technology. The existence of the Internet. Increased warnings about global warming, nuclear war, and terrorist attacks.

In addition, we move faster than ever before. Our ancestors traveled as far as a horse or camel could take them during daylight. But us? We jet through time zones as if they were neighborhood streets.

And what about the onslaught of personal challenges? You or someone you know is facing foreclosure, fighting cancer, slugging through a divorce, or battling addiction. You or someone you know is bankrupt, broke, or going out of business.

One would think Christians would be exempt from worry. But we are not. We have been taught that the Christian life is a life of peace, and when we don't have peace, we assume the problem lies within us. Not only do

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we feel anxious, but we also feel guilty about our anxiety! The result is a downward spiral of worry, guilt, worry, guilt.

It's enough to cause a person to get anxious.

It's enough to make us wonder if the apostle Paul was out of touch with reality when he wrote, "Be anxious for nothing" (Philippians 4:6).

"Be anxious for less" would have been a sufficient challenge. Or "Be anxious only on Thursdays." Or "Be anxious only in seasons of severe affliction." But Paul doesn't seem to

offer any leeway here. Be anxious for nothing. Nada. Zilch. Zero. Is this what he meant? Not exactly. He wrote the phrase in the present active tense, which implies an ongoing state. It's the life of perpetual anxiety that Paul wanted to address. The Lucado Revised

Translation reads, "Don't let anything in life leave you perpetually breathless and in angst." The presence of anxiety is unavoidable, but the prison of anxiety is optional.

The presence
of anxiety is
unavoidable, but
the prison of
anxiety is optional.

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Anxiety is not a sin; it is an emotion. (So don't be anxious about feeling anxious.) Anxiety can, however, lead to sinful behavior. When we numb our fears with six-packs or food binges, when we spew anger like Krakatau, when we peddle our fears to anyone who will buy them, we are sinning. If toxic anxiety leads you to abandon your spouse, neglect your kids, break covenants, or break hearts, take heed. Jesus gave this word: "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with . . . the anxieties of life" (Luke 21:34 NIV). Is your heart weighed down with worry? Look for these signals:

- Are you laughing less than you once did?
- Do you see problems in every promise?
- Would those who know you best describe you as increasingly negative and critical?
- Do you assume that something bad is going to happen?
- Do you dilute and downplay good news with doses of your version of reality?

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- Many days would you rather stay in bed than get up?
- Do you magnify the negative and dismiss the positive?
- Given the chance, would you avoid any interaction with humanity for the rest of your life?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, I have a friend for you to meet. Actually, I have a scripture for you to read. I've read the words so often that we have become friends. I'd like to nominate this passage for the Scripture Hall of Fame. The museum wall that contains the framed words of the Twenty-third Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, and John 3:16 should also display Philippians 4:4–8:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through

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Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Five verses with four admonitions that lead to one wonderful promise: “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds” (v. 7).

Celebrate God’s goodness. “Rejoice in the Lord always” (v. 4). This doesn’t mean ignore your circumstances or sugar-coat them. Rejoice in the *Lord*. Celebrate who he is and what he has done in your life, and celebrate his goodness, faithfulness, and forgiveness. These characteristics of God remain true no matter what you are going through.

Ask God for help. “Let your requests be made known to God” (v. 6). Verse five says, “The Lord is at hand.” Paul was saying because of the Lord’s nearness, we can ask him for what we need. His presence makes way for our prayers.

Leave your concerns with God. “With thanksgiving, let

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your requests be made known to God” (v. 6). Don’t ignore your concerns. Don’t pretend they aren’t there. State them, be honest about them, and then leave them in the hands of the Father.

Meditate on good things. “Think about the things that are good and worthy of praise” (v. 8 NCV). Our minds are powerful. They can either be fixated on fear or fixated on good. Which one do you think will ease your anxiety? Paul was tapping into what doctors and therapists would discover

centuries later—that we can transform our minds with conscious meditation on the good.

Celebrate. Ask. Leave. Meditate. C.A.L.M.

Could you use some calm? If so, you aren’t alone. The Bible is Kindle’s most high-

lighted book. And Philippians 4:6 is the most highlighted passage.⁸ Apparently, we all could use a word of comfort. God is ready to give it.

With God as your helper, you will sleep better tonight and smile more tomorrow.

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With God as your helper, you will sleep better tonight and smile more tomorrow. It will require some work on your part. I certainly don't mean to leave the impression that anxiety can be waved away with a simple pep talk. In fact, for some of you, God's healing will include the help of therapy and/or medication. If that is the case, do not for a moment think that you are a second-class citizen of heaven. Ask God to lead you to a qualified therapist who will provide the treatment you need. In the context of scripture, C.A.L.M. is a simple plan and something you can start doing now.

This much is sure: It is not God's will that you lead a life of perpetual anxiety. It is not his will that you face every day with dread and trepidation. He made you for more than a life of breath-stealing angst and mind-splitting worry. He has a new chapter for your life. And he is ready to write it.

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Reflection

Spend some time reflecting on what you have read by journaling your thoughts and answers to the following prompts and questions.

1. What is causing you the most anxiety today? Describe the situation and how it's making you feel. What are your thoughts about it? How is it affecting your everyday life?

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2. Paul gives four instructions in Philippians 4:4–8. (1) Celebrate God’s goodness. (2) Ask God for help. (3) Leave your concerns with God. (4) Meditate on good things. Of those four, which do you practice most often, and which do you do the least? Why do you think this is?

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- Let's walk through the C.A.L.M. method with the scenario you wrote about in the first question.

Celebrate God's goodness. Spend a few moments writing down the characteristics of God you have seen at work in your life. Describe a time he was faithful to you.

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Meditate on good things. End your reflection time by meditating on such things as the goodness of God, the beauty of nature, or a piece of art you love—whatever inspires goodness in you. Journal about it in the space below.

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God's Word for You

Allow these passages from God's Word to remind you that God will help you if you feel anxious.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-8

God's peace is different from temporary or worldly peace. It surpasses understanding.

“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.”

JOHN 16:33 NIV

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Jesus says, “Take heart.” He doesn’t say ignore or deny your reality, but rather acknowledge it with the courage we can have in Christ.

The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles.
The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

PSALM 34:17-18

The Lord is near when you are brokenhearted. He is not upset with you or disappointed; he is near.

Read the following prayer, silently or aloud. When you have finished praying, spend a moment in silence, listening for the voice of God.

God, I confess to you that I often feel anxious about things I cannot control. Sometimes I doubt your strength and I wonder if you care. I know what

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your Word says. I can be anxious for nothing and give all my concerns to you, but I need your help to do this. Help me surrender, help me believe, help me know you are good despite my circumstances. Strengthen my faith even when I am anxious. Allow this struggle to deepen our relationship. Thank you for your faithfulness. Remind me of the moments you were faithful in the past so I can cling to them as I walk through difficult seasons of anxiety. In Jesus' name, amen.