

BEGIN
again

Also by Max Lucado

Inspirational

3:16

A Gentle Thunder
A Love Worth Giving
And the Angels Were Silent
Anxious for Nothing
Because of Bethlehem
Before Amen
Come Thirsty
Cure for the Common Life
Facing Your Giants
Fearless
Glory Days
God Came Near
Grace
Great Day Every Day
He Chose the Nails
He Still Moves Stones
How Happiness Happens
In the Eye of the Storm
In the Grip of Grace
It's Not About Me
Jesus
Just Like Jesus
Max on Life
More to Your Story
Next Door Savior
No Wonder They Call Him the Savior
On the Anvil
Outlive Your Life
Six Hours One Friday
The Applause of Heaven
The Great House of God
Traveling Light
Unshakable Hope
When Christ Comes
When God Whispers Your Name
You Are Never Alone
You'll Get Through This

Fiction

Christmas Stories
Miracle at the Higher Grounds Café
The Christmas Candle

Bibles (General

Editor)

The Lucado Encouraging Word Bible
Children's Daily Devotional Bible
Grace for the Moment Daily Bible
The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible

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God Always Keeps His Promises
God Forgives Me, and I Forgive You
God Listens When I Pray
Grace for the Moment: 365 Devotions for Kids
Hermie, a Common Caterpillar
I'm Not a Scaredy Cat
Itsy Bitsy Christmas
Just in Case You Ever Wonder
Lucado Treasury of Bedtime Prayers
One Hand, Two Hands
Thank You, God, for Blessing Me
Thank You, God, for Loving Me

The Boy and the Ocean
The Crippled Lamb
The Oak Inside the Acorn
The Tallest of Smalls
You Are Mine
You Are Special

Young Adult Books

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It's Not About Me
Make Every Day Count
Wild Grace
You Were Made to Make a Difference

Gift Books

Fear Not Promise Book
For the Tough Times
God Thinks You're Wonderful
Grace for the Moment
Grace Happens Here
Happy Today
His Name Is Jesus
Let the Journey Begin
Live Loved
Mocha with Max
Safe in the Shepherd's Arms
This Is Love
You Changed My Life

BEGIN *again*

Your Hope and Renewal Start Today

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

To Jack and Deb Graham and O. S. and Susie Hawkins.

*The completion of this book coincides with the
commemoration of fifty years of marriage and
ministry for each of these wonderful couples.
We celebrate their devotion to Jesus and each other.*

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Introduction

Catch a Glimpse of New Possibilities

Water. All Noah can see is water. The evening sun sinks into it. The clouds are reflected in it. His boat is surrounded by it. Water. Water to the north. Water to the south. Water to the east. Water to the west. Water.

All Noah can see is water.

He can't remember when he's seen anything but. The world has been destroyed. It was the end of everything he had known. He and the boys had barely pushed the last hippo up the ramp when heaven opened a thousand fire hydrants. Within moments the boat was rocking, and for days the rain was pouring, and for weeks Noah has been wondering, *How long is this going to last?* For forty days it has rained. For months they have floated. They have eaten the same food, smelled the same smells, and looked at the same faces. After a certain point you run out of things to

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say to each other. You even begin to run low on hope. *Can God re-create this world? Is he able to start over? Can he, and we, begin again?*

Finally the boat bumped, and the rocking stopped. Mrs. Noah gave Mr. Noah a look, and Noah gave the hatch a shove and poked his head through. The hull of the ark was resting on ground, but the ground was still surrounded by water. “Noah,” she yelled up at him, “what do you see?”

“Water.”

He sent a raven on a scouting mission; it never returned. He sent a dove. It came back shivering and spent, having found no place to roost. Then, just this morning, he tried again. He pulled a dove out of the bowels of the ark and ascended the ladder. The morning sun caused them both to squint. As he kissed the breast of the bird, he felt a pounding heart. Had he put a hand on his chest, he would have felt another. With a prayer he let it go and watched until the bird was no bigger than a speck.

All day he looked for the dove’s return. In between chores he opened the hatch and searched. The boys wanted him to play a little pin the tail on the donkey, but he passed. He chose instead to climb into the crow’s nest and look. The wind lifted his gray hair. The sun warmed his weather-beaten face. But nothing lifted his heavy heart. He had seen nothing. Not in the morning. Not after lunch. Not later.

Now the sun is setting, and the sky is darkening, and he has come to look one final time, but all he sees is water. Water to the north. Water to the south. Water to the east. Water to the . . .

You know the feeling. You have stood where Noah stood. You’ve known your share of floods. Flooded by sorrow at the cemetery, anger at the disability in your body, fear of the uncertainty of a pandemic. You’ve seen the floodwater rise, and you’ve likely seen the sun set on your hopes and dreams as well. You’ve been on Noah’s boat.

And you’ve needed what Noah needed; you’ve needed hope. Hope

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doesn't promise an instant solution but rather the possibility of an eventual one. Sometimes all we need is a little hope.

That's all Noah needed. And that's what Noah received.

The old sailor stares at the sun bisected by the horizon. One could hardly imagine a more beautiful sight. But he'd give this one and a hundred more for an acre of dry ground and a grove of grapes. Mrs. Noah's voice reminds him that dinner is on the table and he should lock the hatch, and he's just about to call it a day when he hears the cooing of the dove. This is how the Bible describes the moment: "When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf!" (Gen. 8:11).

An olive leaf. Noah would have been happy to have the bird—but to have the leaf! This leaf was more than foliage; this was promise. The bird brought more than a piece of a tree; it brought hope. For isn't that what hope is? Hope is an olive leaf—evidence of dry land after a flood. Proof to the dreamer that dreaming is worth the risk.

Are you in need of some hope? Could you use a fresh start? A redo? A mulligan? At some point in life we all could. The oh-so-welcome news of Scripture is this: God is a God of fresh starts. He is the author of the new chapter, the architect of the new design, the voice behind the new song.

God knows the way forward. No matter what kind of disappointment or grief or trouble or heartache you've encountered, God offers an opportunity to begin again. In his plan prodigals get a new robe, the weary find new strength, and the lonely find a friend.

Those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:31 NKJV)

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Your current circumstances will not get the final say in your life.

To all the Noahs of the world, to all who search the horizon for a glimpse of hope, God proclaims, “Yes!” And he comes. He comes as a dove. He comes bearing fruit from a distant land, from our future home. He comes with a leaf of promise that he can make all things new.

That is the theme of the book you hold, a combination of new thoughts and some favorite ones from prior books. The theme is simply this: Your hope can be restored. Your dreams can be renewed. By God’s grace you can find your way to dry land, watch the waters subside, and step out on fresh soil.

With God as your guide, you can begin again.

part one

Believe Your Trustworthy God

My dad decorated our den with a stump. I was just a kid at the time, eleven years old, maybe twelve. The perfect age to be fascinated with the idea of a tree stump sitting next to the fireplace.

Over the fireplace, a clock.

Next to the fireplace, fireplace tools.

Next to the tools, a stump.

Awesome.

He came home from work with it one day. It took up the better portion of the bed of his pickup. That's where it lay when I first saw it. Dad pulled it out of his truck and let it fall onto the concrete driveway.

"What is it, Dad?"

"It's a tree stump," he answered with no small amount of pride.

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Dad worked in the oil fields of West Texas. It was his job to make sure the pump machinery functioned smoothly. Apparently this tree trunk was interfering with his work. Quite honestly I don't remember why it troubled him. Perhaps it blocked his access to an engine. Maybe it leaned too far across a dirt path. Whatever the reason, it kept him from doing his work in the way he wanted to do it. So he yanked it out of the ground. He wrapped one end of a chain around the trunk and the other end around his trailer hitch. The contest was over before it began.

But dislodging the tree wasn't enough for him; he wanted to display it. Some men hang antlers on their walls. Others fill a room with deer heads or a taxidermied bass. My dad opted to decorate our den with a tree trunk.

Mom was less than enthused. As they stood on the driveway and exchanged animated opinions, I examined the bagged quarry. The trunk was as wide as my size twenty-nine waist. The bark had long since dried and was easy to peel away. Thumb-thick roots hung limp from the base. I've never considered myself to be a connoisseur of dead trees, but this much I knew: this trunk was a real beauty.

Over the years I've often reflected on my dad's decision to turn a trunk into decor, especially because I consider myself to be a tree trunk of my own making. When God found me, I was a fruitless stump with deep roots. I offered no beauty to the landscape of the world. No one found shade under my limbs. I even interfered with the work of the Father. Even so, he found a place for me. It required a good yank and no small amount of cleaning up, but he took me from badlands to his home and displayed me as a work of his own.

Such is the work of the Holy Spirit.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18 ESV)

BELIEVE YOUR TRUSTWORTHY GOD

The Spirit of God will transform you into a handiwork of heaven and display you in full view. Expect to be scrubbed, sanded, and varnished a time or two or ten. But in the end the result will be worth the discomfort.

You'll be grateful.

In the end so was my mom. Remember the heated discussion my parents had about the stump? Dad won. He placed the stump in our den—but only after he cleaned it up, varnished it, and carved on it “Jack and Thelma” in big letters and the names of their four kids beneath. I can't speak for my siblings, but I was always proud to see my name on the family tree of a stump puller.

chapter one

Trust Your Shepherd

He restores my soul.

—PSALM 23:3 NKJV

Imagine yourself in a jungle. A dense jungle. A dark jungle. Your friends convinced you it was time for a once-in-a-lifetime trip, and here you are. You paid the fare. You crossed the ocean. You hired the guide and joined the group. And you ventured where you had never ventured before—into the thick, strange world of the jungle.

Sound interesting? Let's take it a step farther. Imagine that you are in the jungle, lost and alone. You paused to lace your boot, and when you looked up, no one was near. You took a chance and went to the right; now

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you're wondering if the others went to the left. (Or did you go left and they go right?)

Whatever, you are alone. And you have been alone for, well, you don't know how long it has been. Your watch was attached to your pack, and your pack is on the shoulder of the nice guy from New Jersey who volunteered to hold it while you tied your boots. You didn't intend for him to walk off with it. But he did. And here you are, stuck in the middle of nowhere.

You have a problem. First, you were not made for this place. Drop you into the center of avenues and buildings, and you could sniff your way home. But here in sky-blocking foliage? Here in trail-hiding thickets? You are out of your element. You weren't made for this jungle.

What's worse, you aren't equipped. You have no machete. No knife. No matches. No flares. No food. And now you are trapped—and you haven't a clue how to get out.

Sound like fun to you? Me neither. Before moving on let's pause and ask how you would feel. Given such circumstances, what emotions would surface? With what thoughts would you wrestle?

Fear? Of course you would.

Anxiety? To say the least.

Anger? I could understand that. (You'd like to get your hands on those folks who convinced you to take this trip.)

But most of all what about hopelessness? No idea where to turn. No hunch what to do. Who could blame you for sitting on a log (better check for snakes first), burying your face in your hands, and thinking, *I'll never get out of here?* You have no direction, no equipment, no hope.

Can you freeze-frame that emotion for a moment? Can you sense for just a second how it feels to be out of your element? Out of solutions? Out of ideas and energy? Can you imagine just for a moment how it feels to be out of hope?

TRUST YOUR SHEPHERD

If you can, you can relate to many people in this world.

For many people life is—well, life is a jungle. Not a jungle of trees and beasts. Would that it were so simple. Would that our jungles could be cut with a machete or our adversaries trapped in a cage. But our jungles are composed of the thicker thickets of contagious diseases, broken hearts, and empty wallets. Our forests are framed with hospital walls and divorce courts. We don't hear the screeching of birds or the roaring of lions, but we do hear the complaints of politicians and the demands of bosses. Our predators are our creditors, and the brush that surrounds us is the uncertainty that terrifies us.

It's a jungle out there.

And for some, even for many, hope is in short supply. Hopelessness is an odd bag. Unlike the others it isn't full. It is empty, and its emptiness creates the burden. Unzip the top and examine all the pockets. Turn it upside down and shake it hard. The bag of hopelessness is painfully empty.

Not a very pretty picture, is it? Let's see if we can brighten it up. We've imagined the emotions of being lost. Do you think we can do the same with being rescued? What would it take to restore your hope? What would you need to reenergize your journey?

Though the answers are abundant, three come quickly to mind.

The first would be a person. Not just any person. You don't need someone equally confused. You need someone who knows the way out. Someone you can trust.

And from him you need some vision. You need someone to lift your spirits. You need someone to look you in the face and say, "This isn't the end. Don't give up. You can begin again. There is a better place than this. And I'll lead you there."

And perhaps most important you need direction. If you have only a person but no renewed vision, all you have is company. If he has a vision

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but no direction, you have a dreamer for company. But if you have a person with direction—who can take you from this place to the right place—ah, then you have one who can restore your hope.

Or, to use David's words, "He restores my soul" (Ps. 23:3 NKJV).

Our Shepherd majors in restoring hope to the soul. Whether you are a lamb lost on a craggy ledge or a city slicker alone in a deep jungle, everything changes when your rescuer appears.

Your loneliness diminishes because you have fellowship.

Your despair decreases because you have vision.

Your confusion begins to lift because you have direction.

Please note: you haven't left the jungle. The trees still eclipse the sky, and the thorns still cut the skin. Animals lurk and rodents scurry. The jungle is still a jungle. It hasn't changed, but you have. You have changed because your hope has been restored. And you have hope because you have met someone who can lead you out.

Your Shepherd knows that you were not made for this place. He knows you are not equipped for this place. So he has come to guide you out.

He is the perfect one to do so.

He has the right vision. He reminds you that "you are like foreigners and strangers in this world" (1 Peter 2:11 NCV). And he urges you to lift your eyes from the jungle around you to see the heaven above you. "Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ. . . . See things from *his* perspective" (Col. 3:2 THE MESSAGE).

David said it this way: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber. . . . The LORD watches over you . . . the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life" (Ps. 121:1–3, 5–7).

TRUST YOUR SHEPHERD

God, your rescuer, has the right vision. He also has the right direction. He made the boldest claim in the history of humanity when he declared, "I am the way" (John 14:6). People wondered if the claim was accurate. He answered their questions by cutting a path through the underbrush of sin and death . . . and escaping alive. He's the only One who ever did. And he is the only One who can help you and me do the same.

He has the right vision: he has seen the homeland. He has the right directions: he has cut the path. But most of all he is the right person, because he is our God. Who knows the jungle better than the One who made it? And who knows the pitfalls of the path better than the One who has walked it?

The story is told of a man on an African safari deep in the jungle. The guide ahead of him had a machete and was whacking away the tall weeds and thick underbrush. The traveler, weary and hot, asked in frustration, "Where are we? Do you know where you are taking me? Where is the path?" The seasoned guide stopped and looked back at the man and replied, "I am the path."

We ask the same questions, don't we? We ask God, "Where are you taking me? Where is the path?" And he, like the guide, doesn't tell us. Oh, he may give us a hint or two, but that's all. If he did, would we understand? Would we comprehend our location? No, like the traveler, we are unacquainted with this jungle. So rather than give us an answer, Jesus gives us a far greater gift. He gives us himself.

Does he remove the jungle? No, the vegetation is still thick.

Does he purge the predators? No, danger still lurks.

Jesus doesn't give hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us himself. And he has promised to stay until the very end. "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

We need that reminder. We all need that reminder. For all of us need hope.

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Perhaps you don't need it right now. Your jungle has become a meadow and your journey a delight. If such is the case, congratulations. But remember, we do not know what tomorrow holds. We do not know where this road will lead. You may be one turn from a cemetery, from a virus, from an empty house. You may be a bend in the road from a jungle.

And though you don't need your hope restored today, you may tomorrow. And you need to know to whom to turn.

Or perhaps you do need hope today. You know you were not made for this place. You know you are not equipped. You want someone to lead you out.

If so, put your trust in the Shepherd. He knows the path that leads to your new beginning. And he's just waiting for you to join him.

chapter two

Give Your Fears to Your Father

I will fear no evil.

—PSALM 23:4 NKJV

It's the expression of Jesus that puzzles us. We've never before seen his face like this.

Jesus smiling, yes.

Jesus weeping, absolutely.

Jesus stern, even that.

But Jesus anguished? Cheeks streaked with tears? Face flooded in sweat? Rivulets of blood dripping from his chin? You remember the night.

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Jesus left the city and went to the Mount of Olives, as he often did, and his followers went with him. When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray for strength against temptation.”

Then Jesus went about a stone’s throw away from them. He knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” Then an angel from heaven appeared to him to strengthen him. Being full of pain, Jesus prayed even harder. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:39–44 ncv)

The Bible I carried as a child contained a picture of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. His face was soft, hands calmly folded as he knelt beside a rock and prayed. Jesus seemed peaceful. One reading of the Gospels disrupts that image. Mark says, “Jesus fell to the ground” (Mark 14:35 ncv). Matthew tells us Jesus was “very sad and troubled . . . to the point of death” (Matt. 26:37–38 ncv). According to Luke, Jesus was “full of pain” (Luke 22:44 ncv).

Equipped with those passages, how would you paint this scene? Jesus flat on the ground? Face in the dirt? Extended hands gripping grass? Body rising and falling with sobs? Face as twisted as the olive trees that surround him?

What do we do with this image of Jesus?

Simple. We turn to it when we look the same. We read it when we feel the same; we read it when we feel afraid. For isn’t it likely that fear was one of the emotions Jesus felt? One might even argue that fear was the primary emotion. He saw something in the future so fierce, so foreboding that he begged for a change of plans. “Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering” (Luke 22:42 ncv).

What causes you to pray the same prayer? Leaving your house? Being in a crowd? Walking into a hospital? Boarding an airplane? Speaking

GIVE YOUR FEARS TO YOUR FATHER

publicly? Starting a new job? Taking a spouse? Driving on a highway? The source of your fear may seem small to others. But it freezes your feet, makes your heart pound, and brings blood to your face. That's what happened to Jesus.

He was so afraid that he bled. Doctors describe this condition as hematomidrosis. Severe anxiety causes the release of chemicals that break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. When this occurs, sweat comes out tinged with blood.

Jesus was more than anxious; he was afraid. Fear is worry's big brother. If worry is a burlap bag, fear is a trunk of concrete. It wouldn't budge.

How remarkable that Jesus felt such fear. But how kind that he told us about it. We tend to do the opposite. Gloss over our fears. Cover them up. Keep our sweaty palms in our pockets, our nausea and dry mouths a secret. Not so with Jesus. We see no mask of strength. But we do hear a request for strength.

"Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering." The first one to hear his fear is his Father. He could have gone to his mother. He could have confided in his disciples. He could have assembled a prayer meeting. All would have been appropriate, but none were his priority. He went first to his Father.

Oh, how we tend to go everywhere else. First to the bar, to the counselor, to the self-help book, or to the friend next door. Not Jesus. The first one to hear his fear was his Father in heaven.

A millennium earlier David was urging the fear-filled to do the same. "I will fear no evil." How could David make such a claim? Because he knew where to look. "You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4 NKJV)

Rather than turn to the other sheep, David turned to the Shepherd. Rather than stare at the problems, he stared at the rod and staff. Because he knew where to look, David was able to say, "I will fear no evil."

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How did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion? He went first to the Father with his fears. He modeled the words of Psalm 56:3: “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you” (NLT).

Do the same with yours. Don’t avoid life’s Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don’t enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you sweat blood, you won’t be the first. Do what Jesus did; open your heart.

And be specific. Jesus was. “Take *this* cup,” he prayed. Give God the date of the event. Provide the number of the flight. Tell him about the doctor’s appointment. Share the details of the job transfer. He has plenty of time. He also has plenty of compassion.

He doesn’t think your fears are foolish or silly. He won’t tell you to “buck up” or “get tough.” He’s been where you are. He knows how you feel.

And he knows what you need. That’s why we punctuate our prayers as Jesus did. “If you are willing . . .”

Was God willing? Yes and no. He didn’t take away the cross, but he took the fear. God didn’t still the storm, but he calmed the sailor.

Who is to say he won’t do the same for you?

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6).

Don’t measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on his. Hope is a look away.

Now, what were you looking at?