

Calm
Moments
— for —
Anxious Days

A 90-Day Devotional Journey

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Portions of this book were previously published in the following books published by HarperCollins Christian Publishing: *Fearless, Traveling Light, Anxious for Nothing, Every Day Deserves a Chance, Come Thirsty, It's Not About Me, Cure for the Common Life, No Wonder They Call Him the Savior, And the Angels Were Silent, Next Door Savior, 3:16, God Came Near, A Love Worth Giving, He Chose the Nails, and Facing Your Giants.*

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ISBN 978-1-4002-4352-5 (audiobook)
ISBN 978-1-4002-4348-8 (eBook)
ISBN 978-1-4002-4349-5 (HC)

Printed in India

23 24 25 26 27 REP 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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**“Do not let
your hearts
be troubled.”**

John 14:1

Set Free

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

PSALM 27:1 NKJV

Fear, it seems, has taken a hundred-year lease on the building next door and set up shop. Oversized and rude, unhealthy fear is unwilling to share the heart with happiness. Happiness complies and leaves. Do you ever see the two together? Can one be happy and afraid at the same time? Clear-thinking and afraid? Confident and afraid? Merciful and afraid? No. Fear is the big bully in the high school hallway: brash, loud, and unproductive. . . . Fear herds us into a prison and slams the doors.

Wouldn't it be great to walk out?

Imagine your life wholly untouched by angst. What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats? If you could hover a fear magnet over your heart and extract every last shaving of dread, insecurity, and doubt, what would remain? Envision a day, just one day, absent the dread of failure, rejection, and calamity. Can you imagine a life with no fear? This is the possibility behind Jesus' question: "Why are you afraid?" he asks (Matthew 8:26 NCV).

A whole day without fear might seem like too big of a leap right now. I understand that. What if you tried ten minutes? Take a deep breath. Think about something true and lovely. Or think about something funny. Once you've allowed yourself the gift of a fearless few minutes, go ahead and fill your mind with these promises of God. And remember, if fear, not faith, is your default reaction,

you are not alone in that. But what if the opposite were true? With Christ, it's more than possible; it's his promise. When fear imprisons you and bullies your happiness away, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.

ISAIAH 12:2

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God's Promise to Me

The Lord is my light and my salvation. He will lead me out of the prison of fear.

My Prayer

The Lord Is with Me

You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

PSALM 23:4 NKJV

You are with me.”

Yes, you, Lord, are in heaven. Yes, you rule the universe. Yes, you sit upon the stars and make your home in the deep. But yes, yes, yes, you are with me.

The Lord is with me. The Creator is with me. Yahweh is with me.

Moses proclaimed it: “What great nation has a god as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us” (Deuteronomy 4:7 NLT).

Paul announced it: “He is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:27).

And David discovered it: “You are with me.”

Somewhere in the pasture, wilderness, or palace, David discovered that God meant business when he said: “I will not leave you” (Genesis 28:15).

Do not assume God is watching from a distance. Choose to be the person who clutches the presence of God with both hands: “The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” (Psalm 118:6).

When the cares of this world rush at us, it’s easy to forget that the Lord is with us. We get caught up in hurries and demands. Our thoughts run away with worries, leaving us anxious and exhausted. In those moments, let’s remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

ISAIAH 41:10

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God’s Promise to Me

The Lord is with me. No matter how I feel. No matter what I am facing. The Lord is with me. Always.

My Prayer

Believe He Can

“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

MARK 5:36

The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. Even Christ was afraid (Mark 14:33). But make your fear a visitor and not a resident. Hasn’t fear taken enough? Enough smiles? Chuckles? Restful nights, exuberant days? Meet your fears with faith.

Do what my father urged my brother and me to do. Summertime for the Lucado family always involved a trip from West Texas to the Rocky Mountains. (Think Purgatory to Paradise.) My dad loved to fish for trout on the edge of the white-water rivers. Yet he knew that the currents were dangerous and his sons could be careless. Upon arrival we’d scout out the safe places to cross the river. He’d walk us down the bank until we found a line of stable rocks. He was even known to add one or two to compensate for our short strides.

As we watched, he’d test the stones, knowing if they held him, they’d hold us. Once on the other side, he’d signal for us to follow.

“Don’t be afraid,” he could have said. “Trust me.”

We children never needed coaxing. But we adults often do. Does a river of fear run between you and Jesus? Cross over to him.

Believe he can. Believe he cares.

Does the path ahead look uncertain, even frightening? Maybe this image will help. When a father leads his four-year-old son down a crowded street, he takes him by the hand and says, “Hold on to me.” He doesn’t say, “Memorize the map.” Or, “Take your chances

dodging the traffic.” Or, “Let’s see if you can find your way home.” The good father gives the child one responsibility: “Hold on to my hand.” When fears threaten your faith, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.

PSALM 139:5 NLT

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God’s Promise to Me

I don’t have to live afraid. Because God cares. He holds my hands and leads me safely to him.

My Prayer

“Here Is God”

“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:20 NKJV

When ancient sailors sketched maps of the oceans, they disclosed their fears. On the vast unexplored waters, cartographers wrote words such as these:

“Here be dragons.”

“Here be demons.”

“Here be sirens.”

Were a map drawn of your world, would we read such phrases? Over the unknown waters of adulthood, “Here be dragons.” Near the sea of the empty nest, “Here be demons.” Next to the farthestmost latitudes of death and eternity, do we read, “Here be sirens”?

If so, take heart from the example of Sir John Franklin. He was a master mariner in the days of King Henry V. Distant waters were a mystery to him, just as they were to other navigators. Unlike his colleagues, however, Sir John Franklin was a man of faith. The maps that passed through his possession bore the imprimatur of trust. On them he had crossed out the phrases “Here be dragons,” “Here be demons,” “Here be sirens.” In their place he wrote the phrase “Here is God.”

Mark it down. You will never go where God is not. You may be transferred, enlisted, commissioned, reassigned, or hospitalized, but—brand this truth on your heart—you can never go where God is not. “I am with you always,” Jesus promised (Matthew 28:20).

Don’t be afraid; just believe.

There are times when our travels cover the miles. And there are times when they take us on journeys through troubles and the murky places of our own hearts. When you are tempted to write “Here be dragons” over the shadowy corners of your life, instead write “Here be God” and remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

PSALM 139:8–10

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God’s Promise to Me

I can never go where God is not. He is with me always. And he holds fast to me.

My Prayer

God Is Righteous

He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

PSALM 112:4 NKJV

Righteousness is who God is. God’s righteousness “endures forever” (Psalm 112:3) and “reaches to the skies” (Psalm 71:19 NCV).

God is righteous. His decrees are righteous (Romans 1:32). His judgment is righteous (Romans 2:5). His requirements are righteous (Romans 8:4). His acts are righteous (Daniel 9:16). Daniel declared, “Our God is righteous in everything he does” (Daniel 9:14).

God is never wrong. He has never rendered a wrong decision, experienced the wrong attitude, taken the wrong path, said the wrong thing, or acted the wrong way. He is never too late or too early, too loud or too soft, too fast or too slow. He has always been and always will be right. He is righteous.

God is perfectly righteous, *and* he has complete sovereignty over his creation. *Sovereignty* is how the Bible describes God’s perfect control and management of the universe. He preserves and governs every element. He is continually involved with all created things, especially the lives of his beloved children.

Anxiety is often the consequence of perceived chaos. If we sense we are victims of unseen, turbulent, random forces, we are troubled. But his righteousness, combined with his sovereignty, add up to this fact: we can trust him, his decisions, and his ability to see us through our fears. If the chaos of this world causes you to forget that, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

PSALM 9:10

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God’s Promise to Me

Because God is righteous, I can trust his decisions. Because he is sovereign, I can trust his power. I can trust God.

My Prayer

An Awareness of God

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

COLOSSIANS 4:2

Early Christians were urged to

- “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NASB);
- “never stop praying” (Romans 12:12 CEV);
- “pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion” (Ephesians 6:18 NLT).

Sound burdensome? Are you wondering, *My business needs attention, my children need dinner, my bills need paying. How can I stay in a place of prayer?*

Do this. Change your definition of prayer. Think of prayer less as an activity for God and more as an awareness of God. Seek to live in uninterrupted awareness. Acknowledge his presence everywhere you go. As you stand in line to register your car, think, *Thank you, Lord, for being here.* In the grocery as you shop, *Your presence, my King, I welcome.* As you wash the dishes, worship your Maker.

God loves the sound of your voice. Always. He doesn't hide when you call. He hears your prayers. For that reason, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6 NKJV).

Sometimes we look at prayer as an item on our to-do list instead of a lifeline to love and connection. We think prayer has to be in quiet places, in reverent frames of mind, with holy words. But what

if “praying without ceasing” is an awareness of God and his gifts? A path to peace that blunts the worries of this world? If you have a checklist for prayer that is limiting your conversations with God, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain.

ROMANS 8:26 NCV

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God's Promise to Me

God hears me *always*. Even over the noise of life.
Even when I don't use words to speak.

My Prayer

He Rescues

*Not to us, LORD . . . but to Your name give glory,
because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.*

PSALM 115:1 NASB

God has one goal: God. “I have my reputation to keep up” (Isaiah 48:11 MSG).

Surprised? Isn't such an attitude, dare we ask, self-centered? Don't we deem this behavior “self-promotion”? Why does God broadcast himself?

For the same reason the pilot of the lifeboat does. Think of it this way. You're floundering neck-deep in a dark, cold sea. Ship sinking. Life jacket deflating. Strength waning. Through the inky night comes the voice of a lifeboat pilot. But you cannot see him. What do you want the driver of the lifeboat to do?

Be quiet? Say nothing? Stealth his way through the drowning passengers? By no means! You need volume! In biblical jargon, you want him to show his glory. You need to hear him say, “I am here. I am strong. I have room for you. I can save you!”

Don't we want God to do the same? Look around. People thrash about in seas of guilt, anger, despair. Life isn't working. We are going down fast. But God can rescue us. And only one message matters. His! We need to see God's glory.

We need someone to reach through the fog and save us. When we're in over our head, we need someone to reach down and pull us to safety. That someone—that *Someone*—is God. When you need a rescuer, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.

PSALM 18:16

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God's Promise to Me

God is here. He is strong. He has room for me in his eternal lifeboat. He can save me.

My Prayer

Fill Your Day with G-O-D

“If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross every day and follow me.”

LUKE 9:23 CEV

My friend and I went on an extended hill-country bike trek. A few minutes into the trip, I began to tire. Within a half hour, my thighs ached and my lungs heaved like a beached whale. I could scarcely pump the pedals. After forty-five minutes, I had to dismount to catch my breath. That’s when my partner spotted the problem. Both rear brakes were rubbing my back tire! Rubber grips contested every pedal stroke. The ride was destined to be a tough one.

Don’t we do the same? Guilt presses on one side. Dread drags the other. No wonder we weary so. We sabotage our day, wiring it for disasters, lugging along yesterday’s troubles, downloading tomorrow’s struggles. We aren’t giving the day a chance.

What can we do? Here’s my proposal: consult Jesus. The Ancient of Days has something to say about our days.

Saturate your day in his grace. “I tell you in solemn truth,” replied Jesus, “that this very day you shall be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43 WNT).

Entrust your day to his oversight. “Give us each day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3).

Accept his direction. “If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross every day and follow me” (Luke 9:23 CEV).

Grace. Oversight. Direction. G-O-D.

Fill your day with God. Give the day a chance.

What’s holding you back today? Maybe it’s a resistance you are aware of. Or, like my rear brakes, maybe it’s something draining your energy that you’ve not yet identified. When it feels like you’re barely making it up the hill or through the day, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

ROMANS 8:31 NKJV

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God’s Promise to Me

I can consult Jesus. I can saturate my day in his grace. I can entrust my day to his oversight. I can accept his direction.

My Prayer

Turn to the Father

“Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering.”

LUKE 22:42 NCV

Jesus was more than anxious; he was afraid. 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 was 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.

Jesus 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 the friend next door. Not Jesus. The first one to hear his fear was his Father in heaven. 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.

Who—or what—do we turn to first when we’re suffering? When we’re hurting? When anxiety takes hold? We know God is the answer. So why are we tempted to turn to the quick fix, to other people, and to the things that won’t last? When you’re searching for someone to turn to with your fears, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

PROVERBS 18:10 NKJV

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God’s Promise to Me

I can always turn to God. He will listen to my fears. He will know just what to do. And he will lend me his strength to do it.

My Prayer

He's Writing Your Story

"God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."

MATTHEW 6:34 MSG

You look at tomorrow's demands, next week's bills, next month's silent calendar. Your future looks as barren as the Sinai Desert. "How can I face my future?"

God knows what you need and where you'll be. Trust him. "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes" (Matthew 6:34 MSG).

The Greek word for *worry*, *merimnao*, stems from the verb *merizo* (divide) and *nous* (mind). Worry cleaves the mind, splitting thoughts between today and tomorrow. Today stands no chance against it. Fretting over tomorrow's problems today siphons the strength you need for now, leaving you anemic and weak.

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.

Worries empower little problems and encourage them to cast big shadows over our lives. In the darkness, we struggle to see the light of God's faithfulness. We forget that he is writing our story. When worry tries to snatch the pen and write itself across your life, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

The LORD directs the steps of the godly. . . . Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.

PSALM 37:23-24 NLT

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God's Promise to Me

God knows what I need. He is writing my story. And he will take care of me.

My Prayer

The Prayers He Answers

“If you believe, you will get anything you ask for in prayer.”

MATTHEW 21:22 NCV

I *f you believe, you will get anything you ask for in prayer.”*

Don't reduce this grand statement to the category of new cars and paychecks. Don't limit the promise of this passage to the selfish pool of perks and favors. The fruit God assures is far greater than earthly wealth. His dreams are much greater than promotions and proposals.

God wants you to fly. He wants you to fly free of yesterday's guilt. He wants you to fly free of today's fears. He wants you to fly free of tomorrow's grave. Sin, fear, and death. These are the mountains he has moved. These are the prayers he will answer. That is the fruit he will grant. This is what he longs to do.

Here's what I think: our biggest fears are sprained ankles to God. Here's what else I think: a lot of people live with unnecessary anxiety over temporary limps.

Let's not limit our prayers to the things of this world. Instead, let's reach out with open hearts and open hands to ask for true treasures: a freedom from worry and fear, a greater trust in him, and a peace that far exceeds our understanding. Let's dare to ask and to believe he will answer. Instead of allowing fear to hold you back and limit your prayers, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

“I tell you the truth, if your faith is as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. All things will be possible for you.”

MATTHEW 17:20–21 NCV

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God's Promise to Me

God moves mountains, so he can remove my worries and make a way through my fears. He will answer my prayers. He will set me free to fly.

My Prayer

God Sees What We Can't

No one is like the LORD our God, who rules from heaven.

PSALM 113:5 NCV

On a trip to the United Kingdom, our family visited a castle. In the center of the garden sat a maze. Row after row of shoulder-high hedges, leading to one dead end after another. Successfully navigate the labyrinth, and discover the door to a tall tower in the center of the garden. Were you to look at our family pictures of the trip, you'd see four of our five family members standing on the top of the tower. Hmmm, someone is still on the ground. Guess who? I was stuck in the foliage. I just couldn't figure out which way to go.

Ah, but then I heard a voice from above. "Hey, Dad." I looked up to see Sara, peering through the turret at the top. "You're going the wrong way," she explained. "Back up and turn right."

Do you think I trusted her? I didn't have to. But do you know what I did? I listened. Her vantage point was better than mine. She was above the maze. She could see what I couldn't.

Don't you think we should do the same with God?

Hang in there. Trust his Word. Just like me in the maze, you need a voice to lead you out. Thank God you have One who will.

Life can be a maze of obstacles and dead ends. The fear of a wrong turn—or blocked escape—can paralyze us, send us crashing into walls, or have us running backward in retreat. We need Someone above the maze, a voice to lead us through. We need God. If you need a reminder to look up for the way out, remember this:

My Scripture of Hope

Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.

PSALM 25:4-5 NLT

My Anxious Thoughts to Release

God's Promise to Me

God sees what I cannot see. He knows the perfect path for me. I can trust him to lead me, step by step, through life's maze.

My Prayer
