

PRISCILLA SHIRER

GOD
is able

10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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B&H
PUBLISHING
BRENTWOOD, TENNESSEE

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Printed in the United States of America

978-1-4300-8307-8

Published by B&H Publishing Group
Brentwood, Tennessee

Dewey Decimal Classification: 248.843
Subject Heading: GOD \ ANXIETY \ WOMEN

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DEDICATION

I was seventeen years old when a young preacher stood behind the pulpit at church and taught a message on Ephesians 3:20–21. I was riveted. Every word was like a match striking a fire in the depths of my soul—a fire that has never dwindled in the three decades since.

This book is *still* dedicated to that preacher, who is now seventy years old and on the cusp of his retirement years.

Richard Allen Farmer, thank you for being a faithful student of God’s Word, unflinching declarer of God’s truth, and servant to the body of Christ. You are a trustworthy friend and loving pastor to Jerry and me, and . . . we are forever grateful.

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TEN YEARS LATER

A New Introduction

Ten years. They come and go so fast.

Ten years are no time. Ten years are a long time. And can I be honest with you? These past ten years have not been my favorite time. Oh, I've had a lot to be grateful for, yes. Grateful to God, who's given my family and me so much more than we deserve. But many of the details and dynamics of my ten-years-later life that are different from those of my ten-years-earlier life have been mighty hard for me to live through. They've hurt. They've ripped people away from me. They've closed chapters of my life that I wasn't ready to be finished with yet. They've opened wounds in my heart and in my body where unscarred skin used to be. They've worn on me. They've worked on me. They've made me feel my age.

These ten years.

So when my publisher asked if I'd be willing to go back and revisit this book a decade after its initial release, I'll admit I was a bit concerned about what I'd find in the original

pages. I worried it might read too simplistic by today's more stressful standards. I was afraid it might sound as sugary as a pan of soft, gooey, fresh-out-of-the-oven cinnamon rolls—the kind that a girl ten years younger than I can perhaps eat regularly without showing any immediate effects, but not me. Not now. Not anymore.

I feared that I'd possibly presented a version of God who only lived inside my young, bright-eyed optimism. I feared that when I went back to look, I'd find my tone and my language too naïve, too cheerleader-y, throwing around a few too many clichés that once sounded to me like settled wisdom. I wondered if I might have given the impression that I could snuff out every one of your doubts and questions with the spin of a sparkly paragraph. And all these concerns of mine would've been legitimately worth dreading.

Except for one thing.

God truly *is* able.

He was able ten years ago.

And He is just as able now.

For you. For me. No matter what our current circumstances of life entail. Whether they're crowded or lonely. Whether they're inflicting pain or demanding patience. Whether they're impossibly hectic or hypnotically basic. Whether you're being pulled in a thousand directions or being tied down to a job or ministry that feels beneath your capabilities. Whether you're suffering a loss too deep for words or pursuing a dream too daring to explain. God is still here, and God is still able.

Trust me, I've run every word of the original book through the meat grinder of my current reality, measuring it against everything my family and I have experienced in the past decade—much of which I will share with you. I've added and reworked a number of the real-life stories inside to bring them up to date. But here's what I discovered after my first full rereading of this old familiar title, something that left me feeling beyond encouraged, and it's what I've tried to capture for you, for us, in this anniversary edition.

I didn't need to get *past* what I'd written, as if my real life had outmatched it; I just needed to get *back in touch* with what I'd written, because I might have forgotten it.

Saying and believing "God is able" is not a spiritual smokescreen intended to keep us from dealing with life's hard reality. It is instead the bedrock truth that gives us the hope and strength we need for facing reality.

The losses and ordeals I've encountered in the past decade have forced me to grow up. And at times during the process, I've pondered whether some of the things we say and think about our faith could be overzealous overstatements. But there's nothing grown-up about settling for a safer, more stoic, more skeptical view of God, and calling it maturity. There's just not. His Word and His promises may be older than the universe, but they were still youthful and alive this morning—at your house, and at my house, when we were waking up braced for whatever situations lie ahead of us this day, this week, or for the daunting season that's coming up next.

So let me tell you how I feel today as I place this revised book in your hands or in your earbuds and prepare to walk

it out with you. I'm convinced God hears us when we hurt; I'm convinced God answers us when we pray. He shields us from so many things—things we don't even know we need protection from—because He loves us so deeply. And, yes, He also walks us down paths of pain and pressure, where He stretches us into uncomfortable positions that our lives have no interest in going, because it's in those places—and really nowhere else—that we experience what this book is all about.

I've done my best to give you something here that will inspire you to a confident belief in Him. I hope you'll walk away utterly reassured in both His willingness and ability to engage your life in a way that gains Him maximum glory. I say it not because the preacher's kid in me tells me that's how I'm supposed to phrase it. I say it because, even having sensed a quiver of uncertainty myself in how far I could trust Him, I have found Him more than able all over again.

Yes, ten years later, I only believe in Him more. And, more than anything else, I want to remind you (again) that . . .

God. Is. Able.

Priscilla Shirer
Dallas, Texas
Fall 2023

FIRST

Tell Me

What is it?

Come on, you can tell me.

I know there's something specific that brought you to this book or brought this book to you.

Because everybody's got *something*.

No matter who you are, however old or young, there's always at least one thing. That thing in your life you can't seem to—you know, escape or fix or solve. It's just . . . it's . . .

(Sigh.)

It's always there. Just when you think you've maybe figured out a little piece of it—how you might be able to handle it better, manage it, work around it, or get out ahead of it—it always seems to end up beating you, even if only to keep you awake in the wee hours of the night.

You've tried. (Oh, Lord, how you've tried.) You've prayed. You've asked. You've begged. You've fretted. You've calculated. You've eaten better. You've exercised more.

You've tried being gentler, then firmer. Louder, then quieter. More assertive, then more submissive. You've admitted where you went wrong, and you've refused to gloat when you

were right. You feel like you've done everything you can think of. And honestly, you're starting to seriously wonder now if God can do this, if He can do . . . *It*.

You'd still like to think He can. And your familiar churchy rhetoric sure makes it sound like you believe it. But deep down—down where your soul pulses with doubt and uneasiness—you wonder about that circumstance, that life issue, that dilemma you're facing. God may be able to keep the stars in the sky, the earth tilted on its axis, and the heavens hung in glorious array. But can He do *this*?

Do *It*?

What is it? It's okay. Be honest. Name it.

Might make it easier on you, I guess, if I go first, huh? So I'll start. Because, you know, I've got a few *Its* myself.

Surprised? You shouldn't be.

Here, hold my purse while I climb down from whatever pedestal you may have placed me on so we can talk eye to eye.

I know how it happens: we see a speaker on stage, read the words of an author, or follow someone on social media, and somehow we think they've got it all together. I've done the same thing. I've often catapulted mere humans to superhuman status and assumed they couldn't possibly struggle with the same problems the rest of us face.

But, no, I've learned they're not any more exempt from life's difficulties than anybody else. And neither am I. Like you, I've seen my share of situations that have been so difficult or have caught me so off guard, they've carved out a deep foothold where doubt could settle in. And yet God loves me far too much—same as He loves you—to let me walk

away from them. Because if you and I don't turn to face these things, we'll never come face to face with Him.

So, yes, I'll start:

- * *Twenty-five* years ago, I didn't believe He could heal my broken heart.
- * *Twenty-two* years ago, I wasn't certain He'd be able to save my marriage.
- * *Twenty* years ago, I wondered if He was able to let me safely bear a child.
- * *Fifteen* years ago, I struggled to believe He could stabilize my son's crippling fear and anxiety.
- * *Fourteen* years ago, I had only a thin shred of hope that He could salvage a cherished friendship.
- * *Ten* years ago, I didn't see how He'd be able to sustain us financially.
- * *Five* years ago, after we'd packed up our home to move, and then the seller backed out at the last minute, I wondered if we'd be able to find another place to live.
- * *Three* years ago, after losing eight family members to death in quick succession, I questioned if He could reignite my creativity and passion out of the doldrums of grief and sadness.
- * *Two* years ago, after hearing my doctor say the shocking words "lung cancer" in his diagnosis of my health, I wondered if God could save my life.

And listen, that's just the past twenty-five years. I'll spare you my whole life story in hopes you won't check me off your reading list.

(Alrighty, then, hand me back my purse.)

The fact is, I have never had much trouble believing in the power of God when it was theoretical, when all the action my faith required of me was saying “Amen” during a sermon. As long as the problem was somebody else’s, I could believe in God’s big-time ability with a big old sense of gusto.

I remember it well, the good, old-school “testimony service” at my childhood church, where folks would come forward to declare the work of God in their lives. No doubt one of the church ladies would be sporting a fancy church hat (with a feather or some other décor hanging off of it) as she stood in front of the congregation and filled the microphone with all the things God had been up to—everything from the foreclosure notice on her house, to the repossession order for her car, to her unfaithful husband, to her rebellious child being supermaturally transformed by God’s miracle-working power. As children, my siblings and I would sit in the pews during this stirring part of the service, listening to the lady’s voice grow deeper and more forceful with each new revelation. That feather on top of her velvet hat would dance a little jig, which would always capture our attention. We tried to listen—promise we did—but sometimes we couldn’t help but nudge each other and giggle. We were hoping her hat, or at least the bouncy feather on it, would come flying off her head into the front pew, just to make things really exciting. But Mommy wasn’t having any of that. She’d tell us to quiet down and sit up straight. And listen. So we did. Then we applauded with the rest of the congregation in

celebration not only of what God could do but what He was actually doing.

Yup, faith seemed easier then.

But not anymore. When I'm staring now at my *own* dilemmas, trying to keep the hat of sanity on my *own* head, God's ability doesn't always seem like such a sure thing. When it's *my* mom who's dying from a terminal illness, when it's *my* housing situation that's uncertain, when it's one of *my* sons who's dealing with a set of unjust circumstances, I'm not always so quick to trust. Sometimes a seed of doubt surprises me by taking root and often blossoming into a whole forest of questions about His ability and/or willingness to take care of such things.

Somehow, I think you can relate.

In the midst of these various challenges and struggles that come together to threaten my sense of security, stability, and balance, I've learned a couple of significant truths that have reshaped my perspective on life and faith. First, *I am incapable of fixing everything*. In fact, if I ever think otherwise, if I try to control all the variables myself, I will remain in a chronic state of frustration and discouragement.

But I've also learned something else—something that has changed my entire life.

God is able to fix anything.

Time and again, He has proven plainly to me that He is not held down by what holds us. He has bowled me over with His capacity and inclination to do the unthinkable, both in my own life as well as in the lives of those who are attached to me. As surely as He's tested me, He has also given me

testimony. And it would be a grand cover-up on my part not to tell His part of the story in the same big, bold colors.

For instance . . .

Jordan Smiley, a nine-year-old boy in my church, was diagnosed with a brain tumor that stunned us all. *Nine years old.* Doctors said if the cancer didn't claim his life, the required surgeries would almost certainly claim his memory and severely alter his personality.

Against this kind of desperate, disheartening backdrop, we stopped what we were doing and we prayed. And God heard (as He always does) and answered—clearly, miraculously, powerfully.

For despite what the percentages had predicted, Jordan didn't become an expressionless vegetable, rendered invisible and pitiful by his situation. Instead he lived sixteen more strong years, becoming a normal teenager, becoming a normal young adult, thriving in high school and on into college at Texas A&M University, growing up before our eyes as a walking testimony to God's abundant ability, amazing all of us along the way. Even in death, he left behind incredible stories for us to celebrate, times when God's answer to prayer were the only logical explanation for how he'd continued to overcome, overachieve, and overwhelm.

Could God do it? Yes, He did it. He proved it. We saw it.
God is able.

After twenty-five years, my friend's husband decided to leave her, just ran off to a lifestyle that seemed more appealing to him than the monotonous, daily rhythm of matrimony. So she prayed. *For five solid years!* And wouldn't let herself doubt that God could answer her, seeing as how other believers seemed to be doing enough doubting for her.

But God set us straight one bright Sunday morning when our pastor called that husband forward in the middle of service and stood him by the altar. We couldn't believe it. None of us had seen him in years. And yet there he was, all dressed up in a suit and tie.

Suddenly the back doors of the sanctuary swung open. The pianist let out a stirring rendition of "Here Comes the Bride." And here she came—the bride—the same bride who had walked the aisle to greet this same man thirty years earlier. Their children and grandchildren played the roles of bridesmaids and groomsmen, standing around them while the restored couple stood hand in hand at the altar.

And when they said "I do," *it was done.*

The most memorable Sunday morning we'd ever seen.

At one point in my life, I was struggling so desperately with fear and insecurity, I thought I had lost my mind and was about to lose my ministry. Opportunities to speak and share were abounding, but for some reason I felt utterly paralyzed, immobilized, demoralized by a cloaking sense of dread and anxiety. It held on to me more tightly than a toddler to the hemline of his mama's skirt.

That's not a good thing for a Bible teacher.

And it's not like the fear would pop up just here and there, or just every now and then. Every single day, at every single turn, no matter where I was or what I was doing, I was tormented by this urgent sense of panic to run, to escape, to just get out of there. I was up all night, then down all day, fighting back tears and sweaty palms and a racing heartbeat. For the first time in a long time, I seriously questioned my calling and my capabilities. You probably wouldn't believe how close I came to just quitting everything—whatever it took to make this awful feeling go away.

But God wouldn't let me. On separate occasions over the course of two months, He gave a few of my friends some very specific insight and discernment into me and my situation. You'd have thought they'd bugged my house and were listening in on every single prayer. They knew so much about what I was facing, and knew it in such eerily accurate detail that there wasn't much else I could do but listen when they came over and started talking. He ignited their tongues with words from heaven that spoke right to my heart. Their voices, His thoughts.

And then they prayed. Oh man, how they prayed! Not those warmed-up, leftover, mamby-pamby repeat prayers from the day before. These were the kinds of prayers you could feel burrowing into your soul as each word penetrated the spiritual depths where the enemy had tried to grab hold. These were prayers on fire. I walked away from each encounter leaving a trail of smoke curling up behind me. In Jesus' name, those friends commanded me out of my fear and commanded the spirit of fear right out of me.

And I can say with all certainty, it left. It really had no choice.

I'm not saying I still don't have to work hard to keep it in check. I'm actually standing guard against it right this very minute, shooing its creepy fingers off my keyboard while I write to you. But no way is that thing taking hold of my heart again, because as sure as I'm sitting here, I *know* I felt the spirit of fear lift off of me and run for its life, with the sizzle of those prayers hot on its tail.

I was healed. Whole. Set free.

It was done.

Jerry and I were looking for a place to call home for our family and our ministry all together in one spot. We'd searched for property but hadn't found what we needed or what we could afford. We'd prayed long and hard about it too, and kept feeling drawn to one particular area of town. We could have settled for a feasible option in another neighborhood a couple miles away, but for some reason I felt like we were supposed to be *here*, even though I didn't see how it could happen.

Until one day.

When. It. Just. Did.

I was driving past a house I'd ridden by for three years (including as recently as the day before) when I spotted the sign in the front yard. It couldn't have been there for more than ten or twelve hours! And in my mind I could see our name scrawled across it in bright pink writing. Where it said "For Sale," I was almost certain it also said "For the Shirers."

The sellers wanted out, and we wanted in.

I was so happy and excited and content. And yet there were reasons why, as perfect as it seemed, it wasn't exactly right for us. It still didn't have enough room for our ministry operation. After we bought the place, we were forced to run our office out of a small bedroom and let our staff work from their homes till we could come up with a workable solution.

Little did we know, however, that our new property was attached to another piece of land that already contained existing office space, or that two years later the owner would offer us the land and buildings for less than half of what he'd been trying to sell it for originally.

Less. Than. Half.

I'm not making this up. That's *exactly* how it happened. *It was done.* Instantaneously. Inexplicably. Unbelievably. Not because we are so smart or because we'd planned it out so strategically, but just because.

Because God is able.

When our three sons were younger, we decided to home-school them for a season so they could come with us to nearly every place the calling of ministry gave us opportunity to go. We took them to Australia, London, Cape Town, and too many U.S. states to name. What a privilege. But, boy, how expensive! We wanted them to experience new places, to cultivate an appetite for serving God's people, and to catalog these unforgettable experiences together with us as a family. But we also needed to be able to buy groceries.

Again and again, when looking at the prices of everything and comparing them against our budget, we didn't see how we could afford or justify the expense. Our only option, really, was to start declining invitations and curtailing our travel so our family could be together, since sacrificing our priority as parents was out of the question. And yet a steady, fiery, divine calling kept rising in our hearts. We knew the Lord was commissioning us to go. *And* to stay. We weren't sure what to do or how to move forward.

Enter God.

At one particular conference, a stranger—listen to me now—a man from Singapore we'd never met before in our lives (and have never seen since) came up to say hello and shake our hands. He asked if we were employed by our church or if we were just in itinerant ministry. We told him we were active members of our local church, but we were not on its payroll. That was the entire conversation. *Nice meeting you, too, sir.*

But before the night was over, this same man handed us a check made out for enough money to cart all five of us Shirers halfway around the world and back.

My mouth was agape. So was Jerry's (and trust me, his mouth doesn't drop open like that very often).

Again, *it was done*. Covered. Handled. Miracle. I can't adequately tell you how this moment shifted our perspective throughout the rest of our kids' formative years. From that point on, we were certain that wherever God called us, He would provide the means to take us.

Because He, our loving Father, is able.

My oldest son, Jackson, started his senior year of high school in the fall of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic remained a culture-changing issue, meaning most businesses and schools were still barely operational.

As a senior athlete, Jackson had spent his entire high school career looking forward to this football season. But because of the protocols and uncertainties, his team's schedule had now been cut down to only a few games. Their workouts had been limited by social distancing requirements, and classes had been reduced to virtual attendance. Not only that, but the summer camps he'd hoped to be invited to attend—venues where college football staffs get together to see and evaluate potential recruits—had all been cancelled.

To further complicate matters, existing college athletes whose careers had been shortened by COVID were being allowed to maintain an extra year of eligibility. It was a rule that made sense, of course. It seemed only fair. But it also meant the number of scholarships normally available to incoming freshmen were now being redirected to current players, a change that significantly diminished the possibilities for young men and women just graduating high school.

Like our Jackson.

So there he sat at home, waiting for the phone to ring, waiting for the calls he'd been told would be coming his way. Any other year, the people telling him to expect multiple offers would've been right. But *this* year, with the landscape of college athletics having shifted so severely, it didn't matter that he'd become a stellar ballplayer or had maintained a

solid GPA. My son was left holding only one tangible opportunity for keeping his dream alive: an underwhelming offer to sign on with a little NAIA college not too far from home. It was so hard seeing him so discouraged.

Jackson pondered his one option through the spring, still hoping another opening might present itself. But nothing came. Nothing. The choice appeared to have been made for him.

The night before he formally accepted, we grabbed hands together with our big boy, and we prayed together, standing there in our kitchen. It was a quick prayer. Nothing dramatic. We just asked God to do something—*anything*—that would give Jackson some kind of clarity and confidence before he'd be required to give his final response the next afternoon.

We went to sleep.

We woke up to a phone call.

The call came from the head coach at Liberty University, a school whose athletic program plays at the top of the college football world, nestled in the Virginia foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He'd seen Jackson's film months earlier, and it had just come back to his remembrance the day before—the same day we'd asked God for help. The coach was calling to offer Jackson a chance to come join Liberty's ball team in the fall.

Jackson's hopes went up, and my knees went down. Down in thanksgiving to God. I told my son then, and I've reminded him ever since: *God is able*.

The experience marked Jackson's spiritual life, building his testimony and fortifying his faith, not only because of the

phone call itself, but because of the *timing* when it came. He knew for sure that God had heard our prayer, that He hadn't forgotten about him, that He cares for him. This was the day when God made it unmistakably clear to our oldest son . . .

He is able!

I could go on like this with amazing stories of the way God has changed our circumstances, the way He's changed *me*. And to be clear, I could also give you an equally long list of times when He has *not* answered me exactly how I'd requested or in the time frame I would've preferred. Sometimes I've been left feeling disappointed, confused, and unsure—like when He didn't choose to heal my mother's cancer, or to bring my best friend's wayward husband back to his senses and his family, or to allow a close relative to conceive a child she'd been longing for.

Just because God *can* doesn't mean He *will*. We must leave these choices to His sovereignty. But even then, even in those disappointments, I'm discovering He is still able—able to keep us and sustain us. Able to give us our joy back and infuse us with a peace that goes beyond our understanding. Even beyond that, He is able to craft a ripple effect of blessing that extends far and wide as a result of those things that initially disappoint us.

Oh, yes, *He is able*. And because He is able, and because He is love, our hearts can be completely secure in every situation, no matter how desperate, chronic, or time-sensitive.

So as you start making your list of the issues that may have first brought you to this book, I don't want you to limit your range of options to the obvious and external: unemployment, marriage problems, rebellious children, medical test results, compulsive addictions, looming bankruptcy. Sometimes His greatest miracles arrive not in the form of dollar signs and clean X-rays but in transformed attitudes and an abundance of unexplainable peace. Sometimes His best work is not what He does *for* us but what He does *inside* us. And believe me, that is no consolation prize.

- * Like when He changes a perspective.
- * Or refuels a lost passion.
- * Or refocuses an ignored, misplaced priority.
- * Or refreshes a spirit darkened by depression.
- * Or softens a heart grown cold and unforgiving.
- * Or exposes and transforms an impure, impertinent line of thinking.
- * Or uproots a seed of bitterness.
- * Or breaks a shackle of addiction.

It's not as spectacular and showy perhaps as a last-minute home buyer showing up on your doorstep, or a couple at church handing you the keys to a car they've decided to give to you instead of trading in. But it's some of the most amazing work He does. And from all the attempts we've made to change our hearts over the years, we should know how miraculous it really is! If it was so easy to conquer that stubborn streak of ours, or to calm our temper, or to yank out that

worrying gene—if *we* were the ones who were able—we would surely have fixed it all by ourselves a long time ago.

When God surprises you by changing your husband’s mind, reorienting your child’s direction, softening your boss’s heart, or just brightening that no-hope look in your eyes, you can be sure He’s been up to something incredible, inconceivable, borderline impossible.

That’s because God is able.

In fact, I’m more and more convinced that when He chooses to perform physical miracles in our lives—when He does what we consider supernatural and extraordinary—His chief intention even then is not to blow our minds but to cause our hearts to become more inclined toward Him and aligned with His. He wants us to trust Him, believe Him, and expect Him, until our primary goal is not that He answer our prayer exactly the way we’ve been praying it, but that we know Him more fully and intimately.

And when that change happens . . .

It’s done.

I mean *really* done.

In a “once and for all” kind of way.

So the floor is yours now. You’re my coauthor here. Tell me what brings you to this book. Let it all hang out, right here at the beginning. Write it down below, if you like. Then when you’re ready to turn the page, let’s get to it.

To your *It*.

STILL ABLE, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

I WROTE THE FIRST EDITION OF THIS BOOK A DECADE AGO. I WAS YOUNG AND CONFIDENT. THEN TEN YEARS HAPPENED. TO ME. TO YOU. TO US.

I'm not quite as young as I once was, but I am still as confident as ever in this undeniable fact: our God is able. While so much in all our lives has changed, He has remained the same. His capacity, character, and compassion have not shifted an inch. His power remains supernatural, is never diminished, and is ever available to His children.

God is able.

Whether you and I have crossed paths in these pages before or it's your first time to savor the beautiful truths found in Ephesians 3:20–21, I invite you to join me in this updated, ten-years-wiser edition, where I hope you'll be reminded that your Father is able to take you above whatever you've been living beneath.

HE'S DONE IT BEFORE.

HE'LL DO IT AGAIN.



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