

## THE COURAGE TO STAND

### *Conquering Fear Through a Change of Focus*

I HAVE GOT TO GET OFF this plane—right NOW!

That, of course, was impossible. The pilot had announced we were cruising at an altitude of more than 35,000 feet. There was no getting off—at least, not for a while.

But it didn't matter. My body was in full crisis mode. My thoughts raced. My heart pounded. I couldn't catch my breath. Everything inside me shook with fear.

I looked at the emergency exit and began to contemplate my options. *I wonder if I can get that door open. I need to get air. I HAVE TO GET OUT!*

I knew I was thinking irrationally, but I couldn't stop myself. It was a commercial airliner, so I pushed the button for the flight attendant. When she arrived, I told her about the all-consuming and powerful anxiety that had suddenly enveloped me. She found a doctor on board who then sat with me and asked me what was wrong.

I told him I was experiencing an overwhelming feeling of

being trapped and that I needed to get off the plane. He said, "Well, you know you can't."

I responded, "Yes sir, I know I can't. But the desire is absolutely overpowering." He probed a little further, asking me questions about my life—my occupation, why I was on the flight, and so forth. As we talked, I admitted to him that I was going through a very trying time. I was struggling with news that was extremely difficult to accept—and was even more impossible to deal with effectively. As we talked it through, he encouraged me and the panic began to subside.

It has been more than twenty years since that experience, but it taught me something very important: *For us to overcome our fears, it is crucial we unearth where they originate from, which then shows us what thoughts trigger them.*

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That doctor was very wise for investigating the initiating source of my anxiety rather than just dismissing me as a nervous traveler. After all, it wasn't the flying that actually terrified me. I had been fine for the first hour and a half of the flight, so that couldn't be the true cause of my fear. Rather, as I contemplated the impossible situation I was facing, I recognized there was nothing I could do about it, and I was afraid of the consequences. As this awareness grew, so did the discomfort of occasional turbulence, the annoyance at the level of noise in the aircraft's cabin, and the sense of being trapped and completely out of control.



Eventually, as my uneasiness escalated, I wrongly attributed my anxiety to the plane ride itself, rather than to the real cause of my distress. I was only able to calm down once the doctor identified the difficult circumstances I was facing as triggering my emotions. I was then able to give the situation to God fully and counteract my apprehensions with truth from His Word.

## ORIGINATING SOURCES

This is true for you as well. It is exceedingly important to find the origins of your fears so that you can then deal with them—and the thoughts they generate in you—effectively. Otherwise, you are only addressing the surface symptoms of your anxiety, rather than the profound issues that make you feel helpless and out of control.

For example, one area of intense anxiety that I struggled with throughout most of my ministry was that I wouldn't be prepared to preach on Sunday morning. Especially in my early years as a pastor, I worried that I would not be able to deliver the message or that I would somehow let the Father and the congregation down. I'd constantly wake up in the middle of the night thinking, "God, suppose I'm not ready? What will I do?" This apprehension caused me to spend long hours studying Scripture, praying fervently, committing myself to the Lord, and depending upon Him. But all that effort didn't matter. I would still fret about the sermon right up until the moment I reached the pulpit.

I didn't have freedom from this fear until I pinpointed the true reason it bothered me. I asked myself, *Why am I so afraid of not*

*being ready? God loves me. The church supports me. I've been called to preach. Why am I so fearful of delivering the message? I thought it was because I wanted to see the Lord's awesome work in people's lives so badly—which I truly did. But that wasn't the reason I was troubled. I acknowledged that any transformation in people's lives was the work of the Holy Spirit.*

So after a great deal of introspection, I realized that what I was really frightened of was looking like a failure and being criticized—which is connected to other events in my life. Thankfully, when I took that concern to the Father and sought His guidance in dealing with it, I found freedom. I am happy to say I don't wrestle with that fear anymore.

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I want you to find liberty from your apprehensions as well. So with this in mind, let us look at some of the common sources of anxiety. As we go through them, please think about the fears you struggle with and consider where they may come from.

### ***1. Attitudes We're Taught as Children***

It is absolutely amazing how much you and I learn as young children. From the time we are born, we interact with our surroundings, observe the members of our families, and are taught about the world by our parents or caregivers. Unfortunately, this often means we are trained early in life—at times deliberately, but more often unintentionally, through their comments and reactions—to



fear the things that they do. These anxieties become ingrained deep within us, because once we hear them expressed and feel their impact, they become part of how we relate to the world around us.

I can still remember how my mother used to say, “Don’t get close to the river, Charles. You might fall in and drown.” She was speaking out of her love for me, of course, but my young mind naturally concluded that water was inherently dangerous. It took quite a while before I could summon the courage to get into the creek and learn how to swim.

Likewise, when you learn a principle early in life from an authority figure whom you love and admire—such as a parent, family member, pastor, or teacher—you never fully forget it. It takes a great deal of intentional effort to overcome what is modeled to you and to replace it with God’s truth and perspective.

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For example, I once knew a man who did his very best to appear brave, unemotional, and invulnerable. But when great adversity arose in his life, he absolutely crumbled beneath the weight of the trial. Interestingly, it wasn’t the actual problems that plagued him—it was that he could not handle the disquieting feelings of dread and panic that were rising up in him. I spoke to him for quite a while, trying to discern the true source of his concern.

“I don’t think my father ever felt fear,” he eventually told me. Because he never saw his father express his anxieties, the man

assumed that any emotion was unmanly and undignified. The trouble he was facing was justifiably distressing, but he felt like a terrible failure because of his inability to overcome his feelings.

I replied, "I think your father probably felt a great deal of fear just like the rest of us. But he most likely refused to admit it because he was afraid of appearing weak—just as you are now. But remember that the strongest man who ever lived—our Savior, Jesus—experienced and showed very deep emotion. There is nothing wrong with that. If our holy, almighty God can express His feelings, you can too."

Likewise, there may be attitudes and principles that you learned at an early age that influence how you react to situations and what you tell yourself. One excellent exercise is to ask God to help you uncover all of the suppositions that shape how you live. As He exposes those mind-sets and beliefs to you, write them down and ask Him to show you how they line up with His Word. You may be surprised at what He reveals.

## ***2. Our Imaginations***

Your creative mind is an amazing and powerful gift from God. When used for positive purposes such as glorifying the Father and serving others, it can be extremely helpful. For example, out of the human imagination have come astounding technological breakthroughs that have allowed In Touch Ministries to broadcast the gospel all over the world, regardless of whether a person can read or has electricity.

Unfortunately, the same imagination can become a prison for



us if employed in a negative manner. People can be dominated by what I call *shadow fears*—they fret about problems that aren't real and don't occur. Sadly, because of these baseless worries, they end up missing God's best for their lives.

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*Is your imagination  
more negatively inclined  
than it needs to be?*

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For example, I've known people who were very bright and successful, but because they never went to college or graduate school, they always worried that others would think they were uneducated or unqualified. Often these individuals were uncommonly wise and perceptive about situations, but their fears still plagued them. And because they imagined themselves less worthy than those who had achieved a higher level of education, it affected their response to situations. Yet what does Scripture say? "Our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). It doesn't matter what your level of education is, who your family is, how much wealth or power you have—your significance comes from the Lord.

Throughout the years, I've also noticed that when some people lose friends or family members, they become fixated on the idea that other loved ones will be taken from them. These individuals become hyper-vigilant to any sign of sickness and agonize about normal, everyday activities such as driving in heavy traffic. Sadly, because of their preoccupation with death, they often miss out on opportunities to appreciate those close to them while they have them. The shadow fears completely consume them.

Does any of this sound like you? Are you wondering if your imagination is more negatively inclined than it needs to be? Per-

haps you are not sure if you're struggling with shadow fears. If so, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I ever say to myself, "God couldn't bless me because \_\_\_\_\_." Or, "They will not like me because \_\_\_\_\_."
- When facing a problem, do I usually worry that the worst will happen?
- Does imagining everything that could go wrong in a given situation ever prevent me from stepping out in faith?
- Are there issues that I fret about constantly—such as a loved one getting sick, people rejecting me, or losing everything I own—that actually have no basis in reality?

If so, then your imagination is most likely out of control and needs to be tamed. Ask God to redeem your creativity and help you "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). And stop contemplating all the negative things that could happen to you and your loved ones. Rather, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things . . . and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:8–9).



### 3. *Lack of Information*

The third possible source of our anxiety is a lack of information. The unknown can be terrifying. What we don't understand about our circumstances can cause us to be exceedingly fearful. What will the future hold? How will we overcome obstacles that are ahead? What if we cannot handle the troubles that we encounter?

These fears tend to fall into three categories:

1. Information that we recognize is incomplete
2. Information we may not realize is inadequate
3. Information that we cannot know

*Most of us have experienced the apprehension that occurs when we recognize our information is incomplete.* In fact, we probably felt it as early as grade school. As we took quizzes and tests, we wondered how difficult the questions would be and if they would be beyond our comprehension of the subject matter. The better we understood the topic, the more confidence we had going into the exams. But if we failed to study or if the material was very complex, we would naturally feel anxiety.

Another example is when we receive a diagnosis or report that we don't quite recognize and we realize we need to do some research. For instance, say you were feeling somewhat run-down, so you went to your local clinic. After an examination, the doctor informed you that you have *acute coryza* that is *afebrile*, and that there's no known cure. This news would most likely cause you some anxiety—unless you are a medical professional, that is. You see,

*acute coryza* is merely the scientific name for the common cold. The fact that it is *afebrile* simply means that you don't have a fever.

Understanding the information you're given makes all the difference—and often a lack of comprehension is easily fixed by a little study. This is why Proverbs 25:2 tells us, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter."

*Then there is the anxiety that arises from not realizing we don't have all the information we need.* For example, it is amazing how many letters I receive from people who worry that they or a loved one have committed the unpardonable

sin that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 12:31–32: "Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." They fear that they've irrevocably offended the Lord and have been disqualified from salvation because of some unspeakable act.

Thankfully, those who write in usually recognize that they lack understanding about what Scripture teaches concerning the unpardonable sin and are seeking the truth. But I often wonder, *How many people live with this anxiety daily without realizing that they don't have the full story?*

If you struggle with this apprehension, let me put your mind at

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ease. The *only* sin that will not be forgiven is outright rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior through continued unbelief. In John 3:17–18, Jesus explains, “God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; *he who does not believe has been judged already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (emphasis added).

In other words, when you accept Jesus as your personal Savior,

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He becomes the payment for *all* your sins—past, present, and future (Col. 2:13–14). But if you refuse to believe in Christ, then you must bear all the consequences of your sin on your own—and that means eternal separation from God (John 3:36; Rom. 6:23).

An excellent example of the Lord’s awesome grace and forgiveness is the apostle Paul. Before knowing Jesus as his Savior, he was called Saul, and Scripture reports he “began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison” (Acts 8:3). Acts 9:1–2 also attests, “Breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, [Saul] went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Saul was intent on destroying the early church—preventing the spread of the gospel and trying to squelch the work that the

Spirit was doing in people's hearts. Even Jesus questioned him outright, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). If anyone had committed an unpardonable sin, it seemed Saul was a likely candidate. Yet, years later, Paul testified,

I used to scoff at the name of Christ. I hunted down His people, harming them in every way I could. But God had mercy on me because I didn't know what I was doing, for I didn't know Christ at that time. Oh, how kind our Lord was, for He showed me how to trust Him and become full of the love of Christ Jesus. How true it is, and how I long that everyone should know it, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the greatest of them all. *But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as an example to show everyone how patient He is with even the worst sinners, so that others will realize that they, too, can have everlasting life.* (1 Tim. 1:13–16, TLB, emphasis added)

If you've asked God to forgive you on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary, there is absolutely no way you can commit the unpardonable sin. He has forgiven *all* your sins (Rom. 6:23; 1 John 1:9). You have no reason to be afraid. Paul certainly wasn't (2 Tim. 1:12).

But the real point of this illustration is that sometimes you may be fearful because you have an incomplete understanding of a subject or situation. This may be due to all manner of reasons: the instruction you've received, a lack of experience in a certain area, or even an important relationship that is missing from your



life—such as with your mother or father. In fact, you may not even be able to pinpoint where your comprehension falls short or why it is creating such dread in your life. However, it is important to recognize that these worries do not disqualify you from being loved by God or signify that you are somehow less worthy than others. Rather, it is simply an indication that you must seek the Lord's insight—as we must all do.

Therefore, when you are anxious, it's crucial to ask, "Is it possible that a lack of information is at the source of my apprehensions? Are there aspects of a relationship with God or with others that I don't quite understand and that are causing me to be frightened?" You are promised, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Seek the Father through prayer and His Word. He will certainly show you what you need to know—or set you on the right track to find it.

*Finally, our anxieties may arise from information that we cannot know.* We all have questions and hopes about the future, but if we're not careful, they can become issues that consume us. For instance, I often hear people worrying about what the economy will be like in five or ten years and whether their investments will pay off. I've also known freshmen and sophomores in college who expressed fear that there wouldn't be employment for them when they finished their graduate studies. Certainly finance and business experts can make educated projections, but no one truly knows where the economy or job market will be in the future—or what is in store for each particular individual and investment.

Likewise, I frequently encounter single adults who fret about whether or not they will ever wed, young marrieds who are apprehensive about bringing children into this troubled world, and couples who anxiously calculate if they will be able to retire in the next ten to fifteen years.

Only God knows what will happen in the future or what turns our paths will take. This is why James 4:13-15 admonishes, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'"

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Yes, we should make plans and be wise about saving. But ultimately, none of us knows what God has in store.

This is why I base my life on the compass of Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." You and I may not know what our futures hold, but our loving heavenly Father does. And there is no one who can lead us more tenderly, wisely, and effectively into tomorrow. Of course, this brings up our next point.



#### 4. *A Wrong View of God's Nature*

It may be that a great source of anxiety for you is God Himself. As we saw in Chapter 3, often the deepest root of our apprehensions is the fear of being exposed and found lacking in His presence. Hopefully, as you've been reading and praying, the Father has been revealing areas where you don't quite trust Him or where your understanding of Him is lacking. Your faulty view of how He cares for or provides for you may also be causing you a great deal of anxiety.

I recall praying about this very issue when I was in seminary. I did not feel secure in my relationship with the Father, and it troubled me terribly. To a large extent this apprehension had to do with my view of salvation, though it took some time and a great deal of seeking the Lord in prayer and through the Word before I realized it.

You see, when as a twelve-year-old boy I walked down the aisle to accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord, I can still remember very clearly that the pastor told me, "Charles, you grow up and be a good boy and God will bless you. And one of these days when you die, you'll go to heaven." My pastor was a godly man, who certainly loved the Lord and always cared for me, so I took his words to heart. I wanted to be a good boy who pleased God. But from that moment on, I thought that it was my responsibility to maintain my relationship with the Savior by perfect behavior. I had already lost my earthly father; there was no way I wanted to lose my heavenly Father or be separated from Him by sin.

So I began my Christian life like many others do—trying to be

good, reading the Bible, praying, and doing all I knew to please Him. But I never felt it was enough. In the evenings, I would kneel down by my bed and repent of whatever I could think of. After all, I believed that if I sinned, I was no longer saved—I no longer had a relationship with the Lord. I can remember begging, “Oh God, whatever I’ve done, I pray that You’ll forgive me. Please, please forgive me, Father. Don’t let me die without You.” I went to sleep every night scared of what could happen to me.

But then one evening, I was praying as usual, and something within me—it had to be the Spirit of God—attested to the fact that what I believed *could not be true*. I didn’t feel lost or rejected from the Lord when I failed Him. I knew the Father loved me (Jer. 31:3) and that He would never leave me (Deut. 31:8). I also recognized there shouldn’t be anxiety in my relationship with the Lord. After all, 1 John 4:18 teaches, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” Feeling scared all the time did not fit me as a child of God (2 Tim. 1:7).

So I began to investigate. I read, studied God’s Word, and examined what Christ’s sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross really meant for each of us. Eventually, the flawed belief that I could lose my salvation absolutely crumbled under the truth of Scripture.

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Now, my purpose here is not to provide an argument for the doctrine of eternal security. I have already done so in my book *Eternal Se-*



*curity*, and I hope if you have questions about the permanency of your salvation, you'll read it. Rather, the point is that my erroneous understanding of God's nature was filling me with fear and shaping how I lived. I was constantly anxious that I would displease Him and lose my relationship with Him.

Perhaps you find yourself in a similar situation. Maybe you don't really trust the Lord with your future. Maybe you're uncertain that He really loves you or that He's reliable. You're not quite sure you can trust Him to provide for you or sustain you because you've already experienced so much adversity. How can you be sure that God is who He says He is? How can you be certain He really cares about you?

You do just as I did. You investigate, seek Him in prayer, study His Word, examine all He provided for you on the cross, and ask,

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"Lord, do I have an accurate view of who You are, how You love me, and what You are teaching me? Am I learning about You and trusting You as I should? Am I holding on to any wrong beliefs that hinder my knowing You and interacting with You?"

If you doubt the Lord's character, motives, and plan, then it is no wonder you are fearful. In Him is true hope and safe refuge. He is the one who is all sufficient and capable of helping you with perfect power and wisdom. He is the one greater than all your difficulties and able to overcome them. And He is the one you were called to rely upon from the very beginning (Ps. 71:5–8).

Without the ability to fully trust Him, anxiety will always have a hold on you. After all, where else can you turn? Everything else fails—every other earthly defense can be overcome. As David wrote in Psalm 20:7–8, “Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God. They have bowed down and fallen, but we have risen and stood upright.” If you lack faith in the Father, then it is not surprising that you sometimes feel helpless and overwhelmed.

But you do not have to fear anymore. After almost seventy years of knowing Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I can honestly and gratefully say that God is more wonderfully loving, compassionate, and wise than I could ever have imagined. He has never let me down, and He will not disappoint you either.

Friend, other people may fail to act in your best interest, even when they have good intentions. But your loving Father never will—He will always do what is most beneficial for your life, even when it doesn’t seem like it.

## **TRIUMPHING OVER ABIDING FEAR**

Are you willing to try? Do you have any valid reasons to hold on to your fear when God has said you don’t have to? Remember, He promises you in Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

This means that regardless of what you are facing in life, the



Sovereign God of the universe—your omnipotent Creator, wise Father, mighty Defender, and awesome Lord—is going to hold you securely in the palm of His hand. He will provide for you, protect you, and deliver you. He will hold you safely and bring you through life’s difficulties victoriously, no matter what. Therefore, choose to know Him better and trust Him more. Decide right now to overcome your fears.

How do you do so?

### *1. Acknowledge Your Anxiety to God*

Your first step in overcoming anxiety is admitting it honestly to the Lord. Philippians 4:6–7 admonishes, “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 comprehension, will *guard* your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (emphasis added). The word “guard”

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*God is your safety.*

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in this case is *phroureo* in Greek, which means “to garrison you about like an army, building a wall around you to protect you” from fear. In other words,

when you bring your anxieties to the Lord, He helps you to understand that *He* is your safety.

I cannot stress this enough: Your personal relationship with the Father is *everything*—the most important aspect of your life, without exception. It is the basis of your joy, peace, fulfillment, worth, and success. Through communion with Him, you can find answers to your questions about who He is and who He cre-

ated you to be. Being on your knees in close, personal interaction with Him is how you will surely triumph over all of your fears. As I always say, your intimacy with God—His first priority for your life—determines the impact of your life. Therefore, it is crucial that your first step is to take all that you're feeling to Him.

Remember the words of Asaph, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26). Everyone faces times of fear, but the men and women who triumph are the ones who take their troubles to the Lord, who is able to overcome them.

## ***2. Identify the Root Causes of Your Fears and Confront Them***

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, for us to conquer our apprehensions, it is crucial we discover from where they originate, which then shows us what thoughts trigger them. So let me ask you, as you read through the possible sources of your anxiety, which stood out?

- Are there attitudes you were taught as a child that are causing you to worry?
- Has your imagination been running out of control, creating shadow fears that continually torment you?
- Has a lack of information about a situation, your relationships with God or others, or some unknowable future concern been producing feelings of unease within you?



- Is it possible that your trepidations stem from a wrong view of God's nature and character?

As you think of these sources, write down what they are and what messages they cause you to repeat to yourself. This is important because the way to overcome these roots is to replace them with God's Word.

For example, the man who never saw his father express fear would often tell himself, "Real men aren't afraid. Stop being such a sissy." These thoughts did not make anything better; rather, they made him feel like a failure. But imagine if when those thoughts began, he counteracted them by quoting Psalm 56:3: "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You." Then, every time anxiety rose up within him, it would remind him to express His faith in the

Lord. You cannot tell me that that won't eventually make a tremendous difference in his life. The Spirit of God working through the Word of God in a heart dedicated to Him will always succeed in glorifying the Father in ways you cannot even begin to imagine (Isa. 55:10–11; Heb. 4:12–16).

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Think about a young person who fears the future and wonders if there will be any jobs for her when she graduates. Most likely, she is thinking, *What's the use? All this studying and there will probably be no place to work. Why even try?* Such thoughts wouldn't inspire anyone to do her best—they have defeat written all over them. But suppose that every time this

young lady's mind turned to the future, she disciplined herself to remember God's awesome promise in Jeremiah 29:11-13: "I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Not only will she want to do her best in anticipation and preparation for God's assignments, but she will also begin watching for His provision and direction. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to transform her mind and outlook (Rom. 12:2).

So write down each negative thought that comes into your mind—no matter how big or overwhelming the problem that accompanies it. Next, ask God to give you a promise from the Bible as a replacement for every destructive message you tell yourself. Memorize the verse(s). Then whenever you catch yourself thinking those harmful, fear-inducing thoughts, quote the Scripture.

### *3. Change Your Focus from Fear to God*

Choosing Scripture to counteract the wrong thoughts within you will start you on the path to the third step, which is focusing on the Father rather than on the issue that is causing you to be anxious. You see, if you measure the adversity you're facing against your own ability to handle it, you will always experience fear. You cannot help it—no human can. The trials, worries, burdens, and concerns that arise can seem absolutely overwhelming. But when



you look at them in terms of what the Sovereign Lord can do, nothing seems impossible (Ps. 103:19; Mark 10:27).

Therefore, always keep these two facts in mind:

*First, the Lord loves you unconditionally and wants the best for you.* The apostle Paul asks, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Do you believe the Lord would willingly sacrifice so much so that you could know Him and then leave you helpless? Of course He wouldn't.

Therefore, you don't have to wonder if the Father has your best interests at heart. He absolutely does (Jer. 29:11). You never have to fear He will abandon you because of something you've done wrong. He won't (Heb. 13:5). He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3), which means you can trust He will always lead you in the best way possible.

This does not suggest that you won't have struggles that tempt you to fear and cause you to doubt. In fact, you will most likely experience adversity until you see Him face-to-face in heaven because trials and difficulties build your faith and trust in Him (1 Pet. 1:6-7). But when you encounter challenges, you can be completely certain that He's allowed them for your benefit (Rom. 8:28). You may not understand what's happening to you, but you can continue to live in confidence and victory because of His love.

*Second, He has both the wisdom and power to help you.* The Father is not only willing to help you but He is capable of doing so in ways you could never imagine (Eph. 3:20). God is *omnipotent*

(all-powerful), *omniscient* (all-knowing), and *omnipresent* (simultaneously existing everywhere at once), which is possible because He is outside of time and all the limitations of this world. This is why the apostle Paul wrote, "I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe in him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead" (Eph. 1:19–20, TLB).

Is there anything you could face that requires more strength than was present at the resurrection or more wisdom than provided the victory over sin and death? Of course not. With such an awesome Counselor and Defender available to you, do you ever really have any cause for fear? Surely you don't. The immense support, provision, and encouragement that is available for you as a believer when you rely upon Him should fill you with faith, courage, and confidence. Truly, "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

#### ***4. Give the Lord Praise and Thanks***

After you have fixed your focus on God, there is only one thing left to do—declare your gratefulness that He is helping you and for all He has given. And I don't mean just during Sunday church services or your quiet time, either. Rather, instead of talking about your problems and voicing your worries to the people you know—as you might usually do—change what you say. Begin declaring your trust in God and testifying of His goodness in your conversations.

This may be a big shift for you, but there is awesome power



in praise and thanksgiving. Something amazing happens within us and in our situation when we rejoice and give God the glory regardless of our circumstances. Not only does our gratefulness honor the Father in the manner He deserves, but it also refocuses our attention on His ability to help us, releases us from anxiety, reinforces our faith, and encourages those with whom we are speaking (Col. 3:16–17).

This is the reason the apostle Paul instructed, “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:16–18). He understood the good it does your spirit and the way it exalts the Father when you place your trust in Him through praise.

An attitude of thanksgiving can turn any situation from hopeless to triumphant. We see it all throughout Scripture. As young David faced the mighty giant Goliath, he voiced his faith in God, saying, “This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD’s and He will give you into our hands” (1 Sam. 17:46–47). David’s confidence in the Father’s ability paved the way to victory.

Likewise, when three powerful armies attacked Judah, and God’s people were left without earthly defenses, they went to their divine Defender with the spirit of joy. Second Chronicles 20 reports, King “Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God and you will . . . succeed.’ . . . When they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the sons of Ammon,

Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed" (vv. 20, 22). Judah's thanksgiving was the perfect stage for God's supernatural triumph and provision.

And when Paul and Silas were unjustly beaten and thrown into the Philippian prison, they did not allow their pain or fear of the situation to cloud the reality of who they belonged to and what He had called them to do.

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*Thanksgiving was the perfect stage for God's supernatural triumph and provision.*

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Instead of weeping and complaining, "Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God . . . and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened" (Acts 16:25-26). Again, their attitudes of trust and gratefulness were the perfect channel through which the Lord could work miraculously on their behalf.

It is an undeniable fact—there is freedom and power in praise. Like David, Jehoshaphat, and Paul, when you voice your faith and give God thanks in the midst of your adversity, you are not permitting your emotions or temporary circumstances to rule you. Rather, you acknowledge that the Lord is working despite what you can see and that you eagerly expect for Him to lead you to victory.



## A CONTINUING FOCUS

Now please understand, none of this is a quick, one-time fix. Your worries and concerns may resurface in your life repeatedly and come to your mind often—perhaps even hourly at first. You will most likely need to repeat the four-step process I outlined above many times. It will certainly take time, perseverance, and consistency to root out the damaging attitudes, false beliefs, and shadow fears that torment you. This is absolutely normal. Just be patient with yourself and understand that this is a battle won by determination, discipline, and dedication to the Father.

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And be assured—it absolutely works. I have a long-standing practice that when a particular verse stands out to me in a special way or gives me comfort through a trial, I write the date in the margin of my Bible. This encourages me greatly because as I look at those particular Scripture passages, I can recall what was happening in my life at that time, how the Father helped me through it, and how the Holy Spirit transformed my thoughts with His truth.

The best part is, the old feelings of fear that used to well up in me are absolutely gone—replaced by the deep abiding calm and “the peace . . . which surpasses all comprehension” (Phil. 4:7) that can only come from the Father. The enemies I faced at that time are no more. The difficulties have long since faded away. But the

memory of His triumph remains to give me continued strength, peace, and confidence.

I have no doubt that He will do so for you as well.

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*Father, how grateful I am for Your awesome love for me. You know all about my fears and offer me Your peace. Thank You for revealing the origination point of my fears so they can be rooted out completely. I praise You for helping me overcome the things I am afraid of and teaching me the way to victory.*

*Father, I recognize that the struggle I am facing today is because of my focus—which is on my problems and feelings, rather than on Your perfect provision. Therefore, Lord, please continue to draw me to Your presence, giving me strength and courage through Your Word and in prayer. Whenever I am anxious, immediately remind me to seek You. Show me the promises in Scripture that You wish to work through to strengthen my faith and transform my mind. Teach me about who You are so I can stand steadfast against these fears and declare in full confidence: “My God is wiser, more loving, and more powerful than any problem I could ever face!” Day by day, help me to place my focus on Your faithful character and unfailing principles so that I can be a person of courage and conviction, who obeys and pleases You. And train my mouth to praise You in every circumstance, Lord God. Convict me whenever I speak words*



*of worry and defeat and help me to always glorify You with my conversation.*

*Thank You, Father, that I can lay down my fears on the basis of who You are and what You have promised me. You said I did not have to be afraid because You will always be with me, You will be my God, and You will strengthen and uphold me with Your righteous right hand. Truly, You are worthy of all of the honor, glory, power, and praise! My soul rests in You, Father. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

### QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROUP STUDY

1. Are you aware of any attitudes that were formed during your childhood that may be causing you anxiety now that you are an adult?
2. Are there issues you fret about on an ongoing basis—such as a loved one getting sick, people rejecting you, or losing everything you own—that actually have no basis in reality? In what ways have you been dominated by these shadow fears?
3. When facing a problem, do you usually worry that the worst will happen? How has this hindered you from stepping out in faith?
4. Is there anything you believe about God that continuously causes you anxiety? Could it be that a lack of

information is causing your apprehensions? Are you willing to search Scripture to find out if your belief is incomplete or wrong?

5. How does your intimate relationship with God help you to overcome your worries? Why is a relationship with Jesus Christ important when considering a change of focus in your thinking?
6. What positive benefits could result from the difficult situations of your life? Name at least one thing you can praise God for, even though the circumstances surrounding it may not be best.