

ON-THE-GO
DEVOTIONALS

trust

*a godly woman's
adornment*

LYDIA BROWNBACK

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Trust

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Introduction

Why Women Fear



*T*ornado rips through Kansas town . . . four dead in campus shooting . . . suicide bomber blows up school bus—such news stories flash across the ticker tapes on our television screens. Day or night, we are bombarded with breaking news alerts of triple homicides, abused children, and the steady march toward moral collapse in Western civilization. And then there are the painful realities of our own lives—abandonment, disappointment, sickness, sorrow. Will the stream of death, loss, and destruction never end? The good news is that these heartbreaks will indeed cease. The end will come with the return of Jesus Christ. God has promised this, and he always fulfills his promises. In the meantime, all the horrors we witness on our television screens are not catching God off-guard. He has everything under the control of his mighty hand, which means that we have no reason to be afraid. So why do so many of us who profess to know Jesus Christ go about our lives in fear? Although God's Word tells us we have nothing to fear, the fact remains that many of us are afraid or anxious much of the time.

Do you struggle with fear? Have you felt its icy grip immobilizing your heart? Perhaps you aren't afraid exactly,

but you are anxious. Stress is your constant companion, and you are nagged by worries over issues large and small. From restless thoughts to heart-racing panic attacks, we all struggle with fearful emotions to one degree or another, because fear is a fact in a fallen world. But according to Scripture, anxious fear doesn't have to be a fact for a daughter of God. In fact, the Bible tells us that there is no place for such fear for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Bible has a lot to teach us about what underlies our fears, and it also reveals the means to overcome them. I hope that as we look at God's Word together in this book, we will uncover great truths that will strengthen our faith and diminish our fears.

Overcoming anxiety begins with the realization that each one of our fears has a spiritual root. They are all directly linked to our view of God. It doesn't seem that way much of the time. Our overbooked agendas—even our preschoolers need scheduling calendars today—are natural stress generators. Most of us have too much to do with not enough time or money or energy to do it all, and trying to keep up brings stress to our marriages and worry lines to our faces. Nevertheless, our busy lives aren't the root cause of our anxiety. The root cause is our failure to understand who God is and how he is working in our lives. When we are rightly related to God, when we understand who he is—to and for us in Christ—we will realize we have no need to be anxious.

He is the God who numbers every hair on our heads (Matt. 10:30) and the one who has promised to supply all our needs (Phil. 4:19). He is the Father who gives us all things for our enjoyment (1 Tim. 6:17). He is the God who has promised to fulfill the heart desires of all who seek their happiness in him (Ps. 37:4). He is the one who tells us to be anxious for

nothing and to cast all our anxieties on him because he cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). He is the one who has already given us the best—his Son—and tells us that therefore we can certainly expect his intervention in all lesser things (Rom. 8:32).

If that is true, and it is because his Word says so, then why are we still fearful women? We are fearful because we don't really trust him. And we don't really trust him because at some level we don't really believe he is good. We simply don't take him at his word.

The only way we will learn to *trust* God is by getting to *know* God. When our understanding of him is deficient, we are going to view him wrongly. We are going to have a low view of him. If God is low in our estimation, then the things of this world are going to rate too high, which will snow us under. If we believe that somehow it is up to us to take control of our lives and the lives of those we love, fear is inevitable, because we simply aren't in control of anything. Many of us are quick to dismiss a link between our stress and our view of God. "I don't hold God in low regard," we object. "I live a Christian life and attend worship each Sunday, and I spend lots of time with other believers." But if we suffer from chronic anxiety and fear, we are kidding ourselves. Our view of God isn't as majestic as we think. A right view of God is the only thing that will dispel our illusion that we have to control our lives and that everything depends on us.

Additionally, our anxiety-producing, wrong view of God leads us to place too much value on the wrong things. If we don't know God very well, we can't see that he is the only thing ultimately worth living for, and we wind up living for ourselves instead. Our problems, our families—everything in our world—becomes supremely important. We put off the

gentle and easy yoke of Christ that we are called to wear and instead attempt to harness God to a yoke of our own devising. Many of our anxieties and fears spring from dragging this self-made yoke. “The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the LORD” (Prov. 19:3 NKJV).

Some of us don’t realize that we are trying to pull the wrong yoke. We reach toward dreams and goals designed to further God’s kingdom and to bring blessing, and our prayer requests are for good things. But how do we react when things don’t go according to plan? If, when our plans don’t work out or our prayers aren’t answered in the way or time we think best, we get frustrated and impatient and worried and fearful, that’s a tip-off that something is off-kilter. All wrong views about God result in anxieties and fears about life. The health of our vertical relationship—our relationship with God—will always determine the health of our horizontal relationships—those we have with people, with life, and with ourselves. So the first thing to get straight is our view of God.

Since God overarches everything, we must view our lives and everything that happens to us through that lens. But we often don’t. Instead we allow our circumstances to shape our view of God. We experience something bad, and we allow it to throw our belief about a loving, compassionate Father right out the window.

“Where is the God of all comfort in this heartache?”

“How could a powerful God let my baby die?”

“Why would a good God allow my marriage to fall apart?”

Sometimes when we cry out in our pain, asking God to make himself known, we can’t find him. He seems faraway

and distant, and we conclude that he just isn't as good and kind and powerful as we had thought. Our weak faith is shaken, and we wind up distancing ourselves from God, because our own means of comfort and the people who love us seem safer.

Perhaps the most faith-shaking, fear-generating experiences are those in which God provides a blessing and then seems to pull the rug out from under us by taking away the blessing as soon as we get a taste of it. The single woman who has waited years for a godly husband meets Mr. Right. God has provided at last! She feels God's smile as she prepares for her wedding and her new life as a married woman. And then two days before the wedding, Mr. Right changes his mind and calls the whole thing off. The grief-stricken bride wonders why God allowed her to get her hopes up, only to see them dashed to pieces. "Why would a loving God do that?" she asks, and her faith crumbles. God is not who she thought he was.

When we go through that sort of experience, our foundations can be shaken to the core. "I obviously cannot depend on God," we think, "so somehow I have to fix everything. And if God could do *this* to me, what other painful thing might he do?" What we don't see at such times and in the swirl of such thoughts is the fact that we were resting on the wrong foundation in the first place. Our view of God has actually been wrong all along. We thought we'd been relying on God, but the truth is, we'd actually been relying on our idea of God and on what we were hoping God would do for us to make our lives happier. What we don't see is that disappointments and other difficulties that seem to threaten our faith are really blessings in disguise. They are designed by

God to draw us closer to him, to enable us to see him as he really is, and to dispel our misconceptions about him and our wrong understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

When we first discover that God isn't who we'd thought, when he doesn't turn out to fit our image of him, our fall into doubt or unbelief can be extraordinary. "Who is God if he is not the one I can count on to rescue me from bad things?" we ask. "Is he a God I can be close to after all? I've always gone to him with everything large and small. Does he care? Or have I been kidding myself all this time?" When our view of a loving God is called into question, we don't know where to turn.

We don't realize during the throes of such an experience that he is, indeed, all those good things we'd believed before our fall into trouble. But how he works that goodness into our lives is often very different from what we expected—or wanted. Bad things happen to us because God is actually calling us into a deeper faith, one that trusts him and chooses to stay with him even when his love for us includes losses, the relinquishment of dreams and earthly hopes, and painful experiences for which there will be no remedy in this lifetime. Disappointments do not come from the hand of a cruel God; they come to us from the God who longs to relate and is actually drawing us nearer.

Times of intense disappointment and difficulty may well be indicators that God is drawing nearer to us, even though he may seem farther away. We find proof of this truth in Scripture, where we see several men and women who experienced great fear as a result of God's drawing near. The prophet Isaiah recounts his experience:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (6:1–5)

Isaiah saw God, but the vision certainly didn't evoke happy feelings. The experience caused him to cry out, “Woe is me!” What exactly made Isaiah afraid? He was fearful because his close view of God brought with it a realistic view of himself. John Calvin said that we can only know ourselves by first knowing God, and that is exactly what happened to Isaiah, who got a vivid glimpse of his sin, his “unclean lips.” Isaiah was able to articulate what many of us cannot recognize in the midst of our fear—the instinctive response of sin coming face-to-face with holiness. Contrary to some popular teaching, we will be *more* aware of our sin, not *less*, as we get closer to God, and if we don't understand that this is what is happening, our anxiety and fear intensify.

Mary is another one to whom the Lord came near: “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her,

‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was” (Luke 1:26–29 NKJV). The angel told her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (v. 30 NKJV). The angel came with good news, but Mary’s initial response wasn’t happiness; from what the angel said, it was fear. Don’t we respond in the same way? God brings things into our lives—things meant to bless—and we shrink back when his coming shakes up our comfort zone and our carefully laid plans.

Then there was Moses. Consider what happened to him when he came upon the burning bush:

God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses! . . . Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. . . . I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. (Exod. 3:4–6 NKJV)

The experiences of Isaiah, Mary, and Moses differed in the details, but the similarities in all three cases were the Lord’s drawing near in a special way and the initial response of fear in each. From them we learn that sometimes God will come near to us in unexpected ways that disrupt our lives and make us afraid. In the cases of Isaiah, Mary, and Moses, the event was a prelude to a special work God had for each to do, but they didn’t know that initially. All they knew was fear.

Those whom God calls to himself will likely experience such a divine intrusion at one time or another. And it is actually a gift. God is lowering the veil a bit so we can see the

reality of who he is and who we are in relationship to him. Perhaps you are experiencing a divine intrusion in your life right now. If so, it just might be that God is preparing you for special work in his service.

One thing you can be sure of is that whatever plans God has in store for you, his drawing near is always designed to give you a deeper, heartfelt grasp of your need for Jesus. We often fail to understand who Jesus is for us now, today. Many of us see Jesus' role in our lives only in the past tense; he is the member of the Trinity who got us in the door of the Christian life through his death and resurrection two thousand years ago. But he is much more than that. It is because of his active work today, occurring moment by moment through our union with him, that we are enabled to live out the Christian life and to grow in our understanding of what that life is.

Do you realize that the only reason you experience God as your Father is because Jesus mediates that relationship every moment of every day? He didn't just get us in the door; he keeps us inside. Apart from him, we are too unrighteous to pray or to receive answers to our prayers or to have any favor with God whatsoever. None of us ever—at any time during any day of our lives—comes to God unaided by the present, active work of Christ. So when God comes near to us, even when it causes us fear, his primary purpose is to awaken us to the reality of the active, ongoing work of Christ.

When God comes near to us—and in our case, the method he uses is more likely to be a crisis, a loss, or an unmet need rather than a vision, an angel, or a burning bush—we are going to respond in one of two ways. Either we will cling to God in the midst of our fear, discovering in the process all that Jesus is for us, or we will run away from our only

source of help. For those of us who struggle with chronic anxiety, with or without the experience of a spiritual crisis, it is because we have chosen the latter road. But God is still calling, still drawing near, and the discomfort of our anxiety is his merciful means to return us to the rest held out for us in Christ. May we find that rest together.



the
devotions





The Secret Places of the Heart

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

*S*he's a Nervous Nellie," everyone says about Sara. That's because she tries to cope with daily stress by picking up the phone and venting her worries to whatever friend is available to listen. Sara worries about everything, from a broken dishwasher to a rainy forecast. But unlike Sara many of us keep our worries bottled up inside so that even those closest to us see nothing but a calm and steady exterior.

Maybe you have secret or hidden concerns that no one knows about, things you hesitate to tell even those closest to you. If you are a woman who struggles with overwhelming stress, yet you hide your anxiety from others, it is likely that you find yourself feeling isolated and lonely a good bit of the time. However, God knows all about your fears. He knows their underlying causes and the way you react to them. He also knows the way to get you past them.

God doesn't want you to be afraid; he wants to set you free. Fear, worry, and anxiety are not necessary for God's daughters. In fact, something we have forgotten in today's

fast-paced lifestyle—or simply excused as unreasonable—is that anxiety is actually sin. But Paul’s admonition is unconditional: “Do not be anxious about anything.” He allows for no exceptions. Since God’s Word says there is no reason to worry, that means there is no reason to worry. But we must choose to take him at his word and then apply the remedy that Paul gives here, which is prayer.

Is something weighing heavily upon you today? If so, whatever it may be, before you pick up the phone in search of consolation, take it to your Father in prayer. Tell him what you think you need and what you long for him to do, and then thank him for the way in which he will answer. He will indeed answer, and even before you see what he provides, if you are willing to let him decide the outcome, you will find the peace of knowing that your trouble is in his all-wise hands. Real faith—the kind that brings peace—is faith that lets God choose the best answer for you.

The *What-If* Woman

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

PROVERBS 3:5

*M*any of us are *what-if* women. What-if women spend a good deal of energy and time worrying not only about what might happen and about what they say and do, but also about what others think about what they say and do.

“What if I lose my job in the upcoming round of layoffs?”

“What if I can’t conceive?”

“What if that mole is cancerous?”

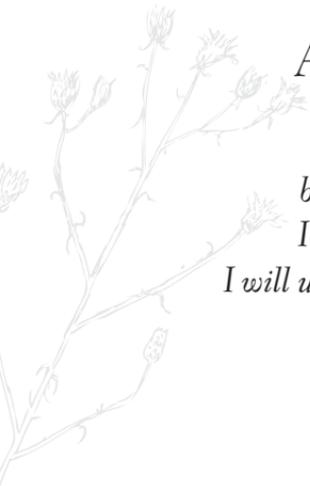
“I just can’t get to the party next week. What if Sally never invites me again?”

Such worry about what may happen is fruitless. Think about it: our hovering over a situation cannot actually prevent the thing we are worried about from happening. The what-ifs can begin the moment we wake up and often last right on through the day. But God doesn’t want us to be what-if women. What-iffing not only zaps our energy, it also indicates a lack of trust in God’s wise and loving control over our affairs. He who cares to number every hair on our heads—something not even the vainest of us bothers to do—



cares much more about our trusting him with the upkeep of our homes, our health, our mobility, and our relationships with other people. Since he not only cares about these things but is also able to do something about them, he wants us to leave the ordering to him.

When we trust God to run our lives, we find that we are free to enjoy him and other people—free to live and love—because he is taking care of things. We are designed to glorify God and to enjoy him, not to spend our energies worrying about the details of daily life or fearing the pain of major crises. He will always supply what he knows we really need for every circumstance we face. Freedom from fear comes from believing that. It comes also from opening our hearts to embrace God's supply, even if his supply differs from what we think we need.



A Phobic's Only Remedy

*“Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

ISAIAH 41:10

*T*raveling along the highway on her way into town one day, Katy was cut off suddenly by another driver, and she swerved into oncoming traffic, demolishing the family car. For months afterward, Katy felt heart palpitations and panic as soon as she approached an on-ramp. It became so bad that she began to make excuses to avoid going into town at all. Eventually she solved that problem by discovering alternate routes. Katy needs to hear the words of Isaiah the prophet: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.” The truth of Isaiah’s utterance is the only remedy for women who suffer the debilitating effects of panic attacks. Maybe you are one of them.

The onset of what can become chronic panic attacks is often a solitary traumatic experience. Many of us can relate to what Katy deals with. Our trauma may, like Katy’s, have occurred while driving; perhaps it was something completely different. Whatever the trauma, memory of the experi-

ence can take on monstrous proportions if we rehash it in our minds again and again. The fear takes on life-altering proportions, while cultivating within us an obsession with preventing its recurrence. If left to flourish, this obsession, like all obsessions, winds up ruling our lives, infringing on what we are willing to do and where we are willing to go. Anything that obsesses us, other than God, becomes our personal prison.

The beginning of such obsessions is often one defining incident, but it is enough to trigger an avalanche of fear. The only thing big enough to conquer this kind of fear is God, who rules every detail of every day of your life. Rest assured that nothing can touch you apart from your heavenly Father's permission. Out of his love for you, he is well able to prevent the thing you are so afraid of, and out of that same love he might allow it. Either way, whatever happens, he only allows what is going to work for your eternal happiness and blessing and his glory. Believe this, accept this, and you will find you can get back on the highway and out of your self-made prison cell. Exercise the faith you've been given, and you will know the truth: you are safe in God's keeping, every moment of every day.

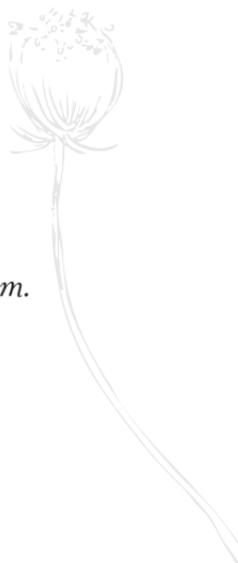
God Knows Best

*This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.*

P S A L M 1 8 : 3 0

But I *have* prayed about it,” Lory complained, “and I’m still struggling. I’m just afraid things will go wrong all the time—the house, the money, the kids—and I guess there’s nothing I can do about it.” The Bible tells us that we have no reason for anxiety and worry. So why are so many of us, like Lory, still fearful? Why can’t we just banish the worry, anxiety, and bouts of panic? After all, none of us likes to feel afraid. The thoughts and sensations that signify and trigger fear are decidedly unpleasant, to say the least! The reason we can’t just make it all go away is that fear isn’t the root of our problem. Our anxiety is simply a symptom of something else, a tip-off that our hearts are bent in a wrong direction.

If we have asked God to deliver us from our fears, but we still aren’t finding relief, it’s not because God isn’t answering. We are simply looking in the wrong place for the answer. God wants more than our symptom relief. He desires to get at the core of what underlies our fears, which, at the deepest level, have to do with our relationship with him. Fear is always a



spiritual issue. For that reason we need to get beyond simply seeking to get rid of fearful feelings. When God allows the pain of fearful anxiety to linger in our hearts, it isn't because he delights to see us miserable—quite the contrary! But God allows us to experience fear at times to help us recognize our false foundations, things on which we are resting for security that have no more strength to support us than a mound of whipped cream.

Lory can't get past her fear because she is relying for safety on a smooth-running daily routine, which is, of course, not going to happen often. Are you anxious like Lory? If so, why not ask God to set you free from the underlying causes rather than simply removing your anxious feelings? He wants you to know that he is your rock—the only foundation that can bear the weight of your cares. He also wants to reprioritize the things about which you care. Much of Lory's anxiety comes from displaced priorities. She believes her greatest need is a hassle-free life. What she—and we—really need is the realization that our lives aren't all about now; our lives are preparation for an eternity of joy and pain-free living. We are going to be anxious if we make life all about the present, about what is only temporary and fleeting. God does care about our well-being, about the peace we experience in our daily lives, but never as an end in itself. He invites us to let him change our priorities and thereby to lead us out of anxiety and into peace.