



BE NOT AFRAID

DAILY
DEVOTIONAL

December 8 - 14

Do Not Be Anxious

Sunday December 8 | Laurie Kurtz

Read Philippians 4:6-7

“Don’t worry about anything: instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” (Philippians 4:6)

Philippians 4:6-7 has been a key scripture in my life for as long as I can remember. Any time I have feelings of anxiousness or uncertainty rise up, I repeat this verse and cling to the part that says, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Peace is what we long for. Peace from all the uncertainty and unknowns that this life on earth presents to us. We long to rest in the arms of our loving Heavenly Father.

It’s interesting how over time the verses preceding 6 and 7 have become more dear to me and just as much of my focus. “Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again, rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” (4:4-5) I have found that by first praising God and rejoicing in Him, I am more able to relinquish my “control” and lay it before Him. In doing this, I can rest in Him, knowing He is always near to me and always in control.

There are many things in this life to be anxious and fearful about. In this season of Advent, God invites us to change our focus to rejoicing in all that He has done and is doing in and around us; and remembering that He is always near to us and is willing to freely give us His peace in any and every situation.

Question: How might you change your fear and worry to rejoicing today? What is God inviting you to remember in terms of His character and His promises?

Prayer: *Father God, we thank you and praise you for who you are. You are worthy of our praise! Thank you that you long to give us a peace that we can't even understand. Help us to relinquish the control we think we have to you and trust you with the outcome, knowing that you are a good, good Father. May you "guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus," remembering that you are our Sovereign and loving God. In Jesus' name.*

Amen

The Good Teacher

Monday December 9 | Chris Nonhof

Read Isaiah 54:11-13

“All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children.” (Isaiah 54:13)

I’ve been a teacher for a little over half my life. Well before I became a teacher, I knew I was made to be one.. I fought it in college for as long as I could. I like to tell prospective students that CS Lewis once said, “I was dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom of heaven,” and I...well, I was dragged kicking and screaming into the field of education! Both of us knew we belonged there—that we were made for where we were led.

As a teacher I’ve had well over a thousand “kids” pass through my classes. I’ve tended to them and cared for them, finding more success with some than with others. In the last year, Amy and I have had to launch one of our own. It’s been a totally different experience despite the similarities. The anxiety is there but more intense. The hopes are there, but stronger. With another child away at college and our youngest now a senior in high school, it’s safe to say that there are times that we question if we’ve done enough, or too much, or mis-timed certain lessons. Thankfully I know I’m not the only one who lies awake at night questioning the decisions of the day (or the last 40+ years).

Isaiah 54:11-13 has been a favorite passage of mine because it speaks to the educator and parent I’ve been called to be, reminding me of the good news of God’s love. It reminds me of my place in his kingdom. More importantly, it gives me encouragement that I’m just the warm-up act for a much greater teacher who will take over for me.

Question: Where has God shown you his strength in your limitations this year?

Prayer: *Rabbi, thank you for holding us and our little ones in the palm of your hand, for loving us perfectly even when we are far from perfect. Thank you for your patience in teaching us how to live as new creations. Please give us patience as we walk with each other, learning to love and care for one another as you would have us do. Amen*

Not Yet, Jesus

Tuesday December 10 | Sam Winn

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- - not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

At age 12 I had two pressing fears. One was that Jesus would return, and I would be left behind to endure the tribulation and spend eternity in hell. My second fear was of being found out as a fraud.

I spent many nights in bed begging Jesus to come into my heart, so I could go to heaven. But I still felt afraid that I was not saved. I worked hard to be as good as I could be and to be a Bible whiz. Despite winning the Christian citizenship award at my school, I did not have peace.

An evangelist came to my school for a week of evangelistic meetings. During one of his “heads bowed, eyes closed” invitations, he asked anyone who felt an urge to respond to the gospel to look at him. I looked. Next, he invited us to pray with him silently. I did. Finally, he invited those who really meant their prayer to come forward to the front.

That’s when my fear of being found a fraud overcame my fear of not being saved. I walked out of that “sanctuary” never having found sanctuary from my fears. For several days afterwards, fear raged within me. I followed my mom everywhere as if that would somehow bring peace and keep her from being snatched away.

Mom could tell something was bothering me. When she asked what was wrong, I sobbed out my fears and my confession about not going forward. Mom hugged me. She, Dad, and I knelt by my bed and prayed. I confessed my sin and need for a savior, asked for forgiveness, and thanked Jesus for dying on the cross for my sins. I invited Jesus to rule my life.

Relief and peace flooded me. Fear of Jesus’ return died. Hope arose. Finally, Ephesians 2:8-9 made sense.

Question: How do you feel about Christ's advent (Jesus coming back again)? Are you resting in God's Grace?

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, that it is by grace we are saved through faith. Thank you for Jesus our Savior. Help me today to rest my heart in your amazing grace. And may this same grace that saves me also be the grace that sanctifies me and makes me ready and willing to live wholeheartedly for you. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

The Lord is with You

Wednesday December 11 | Kim Jongerius

Read Deuteronomy 31:6,8

*“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”
(Deuteronomy 31:8)*

Our newborn son was in the NICU, a machine breathing for him, the steady swish-swish of air being forced in and out of his lungs simultaneously life-giving and terrifying. Six days after Matthew’s birth and the flight to Sioux Falls, we looked up Reformed churches and found one nearby.

I didn’t want to go. I didn’t want to talk to anyone. I wasn’t up to telling anyone new why we were in Sioux Falls. I didn’t think I would be able to hold it together. Sure enough, the pastor greeted us and asked us where we were from. Joel told him and noted why we were at his church that day, and I met his eyes briefly and smiled slightly but then looked away as the tears started. He said he’d be praying for Matthew and for us.

The first song in worship that morning was “Be Bold, Be Strong.”

Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you!

Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you!

I am not afraid!

I am not dismayed!

Because I’m walking in faith and victory

Come on, walk in faith and victory

For the Lord your God is with you!

I couldn’t sing that morning, but I recognized the truth of the song’s message, and I stood there memorizing the words as tears streamed down my face. Those words became my constant prayer during the weeks in the hospital and in the uncertain months and years after we brought Matthew home.

God was with us then, as he always is. We can be bold and strong, even when it looks and feels like we are at our weakest. We can walk in faith and victory, even when it looks and feels like we can barely crawl.

Most of us won't ever be heading off to battle like the Israelites, but many of us will have our own battles to fight, and God promises to be right alongside us.

And Matthew? You might know him as Theo. There's no trace of his difficult start.

Question: Are you facing a situation laced with overwhelming fear? Can you make room within the fear for a recognition that, whether you can see him or not, God is with you? Can you see that glimmer of truth, though hidden within deep despair, as boldness and strength?

Prayer: *God, you do not promise that we will never face fear, but you do promise that you will be with us inside the storm of whatever fear arises. Thank you for that promise! Thank you for the reality of your presence. Please, Lord, help me remember your promises all my days. Amen.*

Hands Held Open

Thursday December 12 | Amanda Keller

Read Joshua 1:9 and Job 1:20-22

“Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped.” (Job 1:20)

What are you afraid of? Growing up I always thought this was an odd question. I wasn't afraid of spiders, being alone, or big crowds. I wasn't worried about money, and I didn't over analyze what to do with the rest of my life. The one answer I could come up with was losing a parent.

Fast forward with me to my twenties. The one thing I was able to name as a fear, happens. . .three times. First my father-in-law after a 3-year battle with colon cancer. Next, my mom, less than a year from her diagnosis of ovarian cancer. Finally, my dad, in an ALS disease progression that lasts less than two years. The one thing I feared as a teenager, I experienced three times in the next decade of my life.

And what am I left with? This is an easy answer for me to come up with: *God's faithfulness and His provision*. I have nothing that is my own, as these verses from Job remind me. We come into this world with nothing, and we will leave with nothing. But in the midst of all the loss, our good God grants us the miracle of life. In the same season of losing three parents Andy and I were blessed with three healthy pregnancies and three beautifully healthy babies. God gives and he takes away. Through all of the joy, all of the grief, loss, and sorrow, He is steadfast, unchanging, and always faithful. God is good. All the time.

During my mom's battle with cancer she leaned on the words of Joshua 1:9, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Find courage knowing that God is with us wherever we go! Whether it's a physical battle like Joshua, a medical diagnosis to battle through, or even a season of battles like Job, God is with us *always*. And our God is faithful!

Question: This Advent season, what can we hold with open hands, knowing that God is the giver of all good gifts and that He is faithful in all things?

Prayer: *Gracious God, help me to find courage today in your goodness. Enable me to rest in your faithfulness., even as I hold my hands open to receive your good gifts in both the joys and the struggles. Remind me again that your love is steadfast and unchanging. And in this season of waiting, help me to say with Job, even if I can only whisper the words: "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*

Stop, Breathe, & Pray

Friday December 13 | John Buntsma

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-7

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

The root of fear is the unknown, the unseen and our inability to process the things beyond our control. As a child many of us feared darkness; maybe a monster lurking in a corner of the room, in a closet or under the bed. Even a shadow might bring shivers in a sensitive moment.

In adulthood we tend to grow out of the fears we experienced as a child, and yet we often develop new fears. There is no shortage of opportunities to be fearful.

My most fearful moment was when Cheryl, my wife, was diagnosed with cancer. As the progression of medical tests started we were assured that it was likely nothing and it was just a procedural step. We would likely be assured of a comfortable report in a couple of weeks. Instead tests came back positive the next day and appointments were scheduled for a couple of days later rather than waiting weeks to get on the schedule.

It was a time when just saying the word cancer was scary. Some didn't even want to approach you because of the fears surrounding that diagnosis. People fear saying the wrong thing. Our fears were exacerbated by having our very young daughter.

That initial anxiety was crushed by prayer – our prayers and the prayers of many others. One doesn't really know what “peace beyond understanding” means unless you have experienced that.

I submit that there is much in our day-to-day lives that could generate fear if we allowed it to. Prayer and the assurance we have as children of God are a shield against the many unknowns we face.

A Black gospel tune that runs through my mind has a lyric that says, “If we worry, don’t pray; and if we pray, don’t worry.” There is much wisdom in this simple lyric as we face the worrisome things in our lives. Let us hear the Spirit’s invitation today to just stop, take a breath, and pray.

Question: Reflect on a time in your life when you experienced something scary or anxiety-inducing, and God gave you a “peace beyond understanding.” Recall how God’s grace was sufficient for you in that experience. How might God want to give you his peace now, as you consider your present fears?

Prayer: *For today’s prayer, let’s try something called a “breath prayer.” Get in a comfortable posture, close your eyes and hold your palms face-up. As you breathe in slowly, pray silently, “Be not afraid.” Hold it for 4 seconds. Then as you breathe out slowly, pray silently, “For I am with you.” Hold for 4 seconds. Repeat this two or three times (or as many times as you’d like). Imagine God breathing his peace into you as you do this exercise. Simply rest in Jesus’s presence.*

I Believe; Help My Unbelief!

Saturday December 14 | Harrison Wiebe Faber

Read Mark 9:14-29

"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed; 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'" (Mark 9:24)

In the Fall of 2018 my wife and I moved from our 2,500 person, rural Kansas hometown to London, England where she earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in acting. Upon arriving in London, we got settled in our tiny apartment (it was a bedroom). Molly began her classes and I began looking for work. After a few weeks of looking I was finally successful. I got a part-time job at a salad bar (think Subway but for salads) where I got paid £200 each week, in cash.

Unfortunately, this was like putting out a fire with a squirt gun. We were burning through our savings and things were clearly unsustainable. As I continued searching for full-time employment, I found a job opening at a school that was a 2-minute walk from where we lived. It was perfect. I went to an interview that, while I didn't think I aced it, I thought went pretty well. It felt like destiny. Like God had placed this job in my lap at the perfect time. We were struggling and rarely in my life have I wanted something so badly.

As you may have guessed I didn't get the job. We were devastated. I thought this was our lifeline from God. It was supposed to be a confirmation that we were on the path God had set for us. I got scared. We would be out of money by Christmas. And I doubted. I doubted God and the direction we felt called in.

I've never been a big memorizer of Scripture, but this pleading refrain from a demon possessed boy's father to have Jesus and the Holy Spirit meet him in his unbelief, to prop him up in his doubt, has been a verse I have returned to in moments of fear and doubt. God met us in our fears and doubts that winter, and propped us up just like the boy's dad. We didn't know what would happen, but we exclaimed "I believe!" and God filled in the rest. The doubts, like Mariah Carey at Christmas, keep coming back, but thankfully God hasn't gone anywhere.

Question: How has God met you and propped you up in your fear and doubt recently?

Prayer: *Almighty God, thank you for. For meeting us in our unbelief. Thank you for remaining with us, propping us up. Thank you for knowing what we need, even if it is unclear to us. Give us the strength and courage to exclaim "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Amen.*

