

MAX LUCADO



MAX LUCADO'S  
FIRST BOOK

ON THE  
ANVIL



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*On the Anvil*

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TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER,  
two people with the courage of a giant,  
and the heart of a child.

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and your fingers on the typewriter.

And, most of all, to my lifelong partner, Denalyn.  
If every man had a wife like you,  
how sweet the world would be!

## FOREWORD

Flipping through the pages of this book brings a flood of memories of where I was when the words were written. Most of the pieces were composed when I was an associate minister of a downtown church in Miami, Florida, years ago. One of my tasks was to write a weekly article for the church bulletin. Many ministers dread such tedium. But I grew to relish the task. Because I was single at the time, I stayed in my office until late at night, writing and rewriting the pieces. The bulletin was small, so my essays were brief. I had no thought that the articles would ever be read outside of the church, which explains why many of the illustrations are local. But the pieces were read outside of Miami. I began receiving letters from people around the country requesting copies of the articles. For the first time, I was exposed to the power of the written word. The pen, I realized, would speak to people I did not know, in places I might never go, in ways I otherwise never could.

I was amazed.

Then I received a letter from Randy Mayeux, a friend who at that time lived on the West Coast. “You should consider writing for publication,” he said. I thanked him, filed the letter away, and didn’t give the idea much thought. It wasn’t that I wasn’t interested. I just didn’t have the time. I was busy preparing for my wedding and a move to Brazil. Where would

I find time to rework the articles, compile them in a book, and mail them to publishers?

The answer? I found the time in Brazil. When Denalyn and I moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1983, we spent several hours a day in language study. During the evenings I wrote. I spent several weeks rewriting the articles and weaving them into a manuscript. Not knowing the name of a single publisher, I went into my library and copied the addresses of fifteen publishing houses and mailed them all a copy.

Six sent it back unopened. Six opened it, but said “no, thanks.” Three expressed an interest, and one of those three, Tyndale House, sent me a contract. I was stunned. I will forever be grateful to Dr. Wendell Hawley and the Tyndale family for taking a risk on me and publishing my first book.

*On the Anvil* predates many better-known efforts such as *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, *Traveling Light*, and *3:16: The Numbers of Hope*. It’s the only book I wrote when I was single. In fact, it’s the only book I wrote before I had children. If I remember correctly, I received the contract the same day Denalyn and I received news of her first pregnancy.

It is also the only book of mine my father ever saw. He died soon after its initial publication.

I never dreamed of being an author. Never. The words in the book are not those of an aspiring penman. As you read *On the Anvil*, you are reading the thoughts of a young missionary writing from his soul. The style isn’t as good as it should be. Some of the pieces are too abrupt, others are too wordy—but it’s my first book, and it has a special place in my heart. I wouldn’t change a single word of it.

Thanks again to Tyndale for taking the chance. Thanks to Dr. Wendell Hawley and Mark Carpenter for seeing the potential. And thanks to you for picking up this edition of *On the Anvil*.

— Max Lucado

# INTRODUCTION

## THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP

In the shop of a blacksmith, there are three types of tools.  
There are tools on the junk pile:

*outdated,*

*broken,*

*dull,*

*rusty.*

They sit in the cobwebbed corner, useless to their master,  
oblivious to their calling.

There are tools on the anvil:

*melted down,*

*molten hot,*

*moldable,*

*changeable.*

They lie on the anvil, being shaped by their master, accepting  
their calling.

There are tools of usefulness:

*sharpened,*

*primed,*

*defined,*

*mobile.*

They lie ready in the blacksmith's tool chest, available to their  
master, fulfilling their calling.

Some people lie useless:

*lives broken,*  
*talents wasting,*  
*fires quenched,*  
*dreams dashed.*

They are tossed in with the scrap iron, in desperate need of repair, with no notion of purpose.

Others lie on the anvil:

*hearts open,*  
*hungry to change,*  
*wounds healing,*  
*visions clearing.*

They welcome the painful pounding of the blacksmith's hammer, longing to be rebuilt, begging to be called.

Others lie in their Master's hands:

*well tuned,*  
*uncompromising,*  
*polished,*  
*productive.*

They respond to their Master's forearm, demanding nothing, surrendering all.

We are all somewhere in the blacksmith's shop. We are either on the scrap pile, in the Master's hands on the anvil, or in the tool chest. (Some of us have been in all three.)

In this collection of writings, we'll take a tour of the "shop." We'll examine all tools and look in all corners. From the shelves to the workbench, from the water to the fire . . .

And I'm sure that somewhere you'll see yourself.

We'll discover what Paul meant when he spoke of becoming "an instrument for noble purposes." And what a becoming it is! The rubbish pile of broken tools, the anvil of recasting, the hands of the Master—it's a simultaneously joyful and painful voyage.

And for you who make the journey—who leave the heap and enter the fire, dare to be pounded on God's anvil, and doggedly seek to discover your own purpose—take courage, for you await the privilege of being called "God's chosen instruments."

PART ONE  
THE PILE OF  
BROKEN TOOLS



# THE PILE OF BROKEN TOOLS

*To find me, look over in the corner of the shop,  
over here,  
behind the cobwebs,  
beneath the dust,  
in the darkness.*

*There are scores of us,  
broken handles,  
dulled blades,  
cracked iron.*

*Some of us were useful once, and then . . . many of us never  
were.*

*But, listen, don't feel sorry for me.  
Life ain't so bad here in the pile . . .  
no work,  
no anvils,  
no pain,  
no sharpening,*

*And yet, the days are very long.*

Are you broken, too?

Do you think God might be calling you “off the pile”? What would that require of you?

# I AM VERY WEARY

It will be remembered as one of the most confounding missing-persons cases.

In August 1930, forty-five-year-old Joseph Crater waved good-bye to friends after an evening meal in a New York restaurant, flagged down a taxi, and rode off. He was never seen or heard from again.

Fifty years of research has offered countless theories but no conclusions. Since Crater was a successful New York Supreme Court judge, many have suspected murder, but a solid lead has never been found. Other options have been presented: kidnapping, Mafia involvement, even suicide.

A search of his apartment revealed one clue. It was a note attached to a check, and both were left for his wife. The check was for a sizable amount, and the note simply read, “I am very weary. Love, Joe.”

The note could have been nothing more than a thought at the end of a hard day. Or it could have meant a great deal more—the epitaph of a despairing man.

Weariness is tough. I don't mean the physical weariness that comes from mowing the lawn or the mental weariness that follows a hard day of decisions and thinking. No, the weariness that attacked Judge Crater is much worse. It's the weariness that comes just before you give up. That feeling of honest desperation. It's the dispirited father, the abandoned child, or the retiree with time on his hands. It's that stage in life when motivation disappears: the children grow up, a job is lost, a spouse dies. The result is weariness—deep, lonely, frustrated weariness.

Only one man in history has claimed to have an answer for it. He stands before all the Joseph Craters of the world with the same promise: “Come to me, all you who are weary . . . and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Have you ever been truly weary? What do you do when you feel that way?

Have you ever known the rest Christ offers? If not, why not?

How do you place yourself in Christ's rest?

# NOW, DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY!

Peter followed at a distance.

LUKE 22:54

Peter was sharp.

*He kept his distance from Jesus.*

*“I’ll stay close enough to see him,” Peter reasoned.*

*“But not too close, or I may get caught.”*

Good thinking, Peter.

*Don’t get too involved—it might hurt.*

*Don’t be too loyal—you might get branded.*

*Don’t show too much concern—they’ll crucify you, too.*

We need more men like you, Peter.

*Men who keep religion in its place.*

*Men who don’t stir the water.*

*Men who reek with mediocrity.*

That's the kind of man God needs, yessir.

*One who knows how to keep his distance:*

*“Now, I’ll pay my dues and I’ll come once a week,  
but . . . well . . . you can get carried away, you know.”*

Yes, you can get carried away . . .

*up a hill*

*to a cross*

*—and killed.*

Peter learned a lesson that day—a hard lesson.

*It is better to have never followed Jesus than to have  
followed him and denied him.*

Mark these words:

*Follow at a distance and you’ll deny the Master. Period.*

*You won’t die for a man you can’t touch. Period.*

*But stay near to him, in his shadow. . . .*

*You’ll die with him, gladly.*

Have you been “carried away” by Jesus?

What keeps you at a distance? What do you need to give to God?

## SOUR GRAPES

I once knew a man who treated Bible class and the worship service like a harsh movie critic treats a new release.

*“Entertain me!”*

*Arms folded.*

*Lips tight.*

*Expectant.*

*“This had better  
be good.”*

With a ruthless eye and a critical ear

*he sat*

*and watched*

*and listened.*

The teacher, the minister, the music director—all were his prey. And woe be unto the teacher who didn’t ask his opinion, unto the minister who went a few minutes over, unto the music director who chose songs the critic didn’t know.

I once knew a man who came every Sunday to be entertained and not to encourage. He remarked that the Sunday afternoon game was more exciting than the Sunday morning assembly.

I wasn't surprised.

Sound familiar? What negative impact does this type of person have?

Have you ever felt like that man? What influences helped you shift your attitude?