



CERTAIN
PEACE

IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



Shirley Dobson



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Certain Peace in Uncertain Times

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Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this book to my family. First, to my precious mother, who brought peace and love into our home during troubled times and whose prayers have sustained me all these years. Also, to my stepdad, Joe, who with his contagious smile brought laughter, fun, and stability to my life when I needed it most. He is a treasure. And to my only brother, John, who has been my lifelong friend.

To my wonderful husband, Jim, who continues to be God's greatest love gift to me and who has brought happiness, adventure, and excitement to my life. After forty-seven years of marriage, I think it's going to work!

Last, to my two children, Danae and Ryan, whom I deeply love and count it a privilege to pray for daily. May they run with perseverance the race that is set before them, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of their faith (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Thank you all for the many ways you have blessed my life.

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

This little book, *Certain Peace in Uncertain Times*, will help you discover a life-changing gift. It's one God wants especially to give His people in times of uncertainty and suffering. Although it comes wrapped in anxiety, the gift itself—a breakthrough in your prayer life—is a treasure.

I hope you read every page of Shirley Dobson's book with great anticipation. You'll find tremendous insights from a woman who has made prayer a lifelong passion, and who has become an inspiring prayer mentor to thousands.

You should know that you are part of a tremendous nationwide movement toward prayer. Perhaps this renewed interest arises from the unusual challenges we face. When the horrors of September 11 unfolded, people gathered by the thousands. To do what? To pray. Longtime ministry friends in Washington, D.C., tell me they have never seen more leaders on Capitol Hill meeting simply to pray. The president himself recently said that the remark he hears most often as he travels the country is "Mr. President, I want you to know I'm praying for you."

The very fact that you're reading this now means, I believe, that God is at work in new ways in your life.

You should expect and prepare for significant personal change. In fact, if you're like many who read my book *The Prayer of Jabez*, you're about to make a shocking discovery—that God delights to answer a specific prayer in a specific way for you. Of course, most Christians believe in prayer in a general sort of way. But you're about to find out from personal experience that God wants to hear from *you*—your praises, your confessions, your innermost thoughts, your urgent requests. He is waiting for you to open your heart to His love and leading—and He's poised to answer your prayers in ways you've never before imagined (Ephesians 3:20).

Keep reading, and keep praying. Your life will never be the same. And neither will your world.

God bless you on your journey!

BRUCE WILKINSON

WALK THRU THE BIBLE MINISTRIES

ATLANTA

Preface

Are you afraid? Do you often worry? Are you sometimes so anxious that you don't even want to get out of bed in the morning?

In today's tumultuous times, we all have moments like these—myself included. But there is an antidote for this anxious age. It connects us to the greatest source of peace, hope, and security that we could ever imagine. The cure is a remarkable gift from our loving and merciful God. It's called *prayer*.

I'd like to share with you how prayer works, and how important it is to God. In this little book you will discover a four-step approach to prayer known as "P.R.A.Y." You'll also find a thirty-one-day devotional filled with wonderful examples of how to apply the P.R.A.Y. method. But most of all, you will see how talking to God has changed my life—and how it can change yours.

Won't you join me?

Chapter 1



SEARCHING FOR PEACE IN AN ANXIOUS WORLD

The phone was ringing. I tried to blink sleep out of my eyes and focus on the clock next to my bed: *midnight*. I picked up the receiver.

The woman on the other end of the line was hysterical. Through tears, she told me that she was a single mother living in California with her three young children. She was having a panic attack. Over and over she told me, “I can’t cope—I can’t deal with all this!”

This young mom is not alone.

Most of us are struggling to cope with “all this.” We are members of an increasingly stressed-out society. According to one researcher, one-third of the U.S. population experienced a panic attack in the last year.

More than 19 million Americans suffer from debilitating anxiety disorders. *Harvard Business Review* has reported that stress-related symptoms account for 60 to 90 percent of medical office visits. Our pharmacies can barely keep Maalox and Prozac in stock.

What is happening? Why do so many of us live in a continual state of fear and anxiety?

We each have our own set of reasons: Health problems. Marital difficulties. Parenting battles. Financial struggles. An amoral culture. Technological advances that accelerate the pace of life into a dizzying spin. Violence on our roads and in our schools. And most recently, threats of terrorist attacks in a variety of forms. Today, even the formerly mundane task of opening a letter can be a life-threatening event! I know of at least one mother who wouldn't let her daughter open Christmas cards for fear of anthrax exposure.

At the same time, some of us are contending with fears that stem from our past. I still remember the pain and anxiety I endured as a little girl, watching helplessly as my father's addiction to alcohol grew steadily worse. I didn't understand his erratic and sometimes volatile behavior, and I became ashamed of him and of our run-down home. There was not a single blade of grass in our front or backyard. Paint was peeling off the outside of the house and some of the rooms inside. I was too

embarrassed to invite a friend over to spend the night. Millions of other children have experienced these same distressing circumstances.

Studies reveal that one-fourth of children in the world today live in an unstable or dangerous environment. When a boy or girl grows up in a home characterized by violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or any unhealthy behavior or attitude, he or she typically feels ashamed, humiliated, and insecure. I know firsthand that these feelings are not easily erased in adulthood.

Not everyone, of course, is struggling with troubles past and present. Yet even those who are “coping” often find it hard to relax today. After all, a crisis could be right around the corner. It seems to be one of the rules of living—just when we think we have our little world buttoned down, we encounter what a friend of mine calls a “suddenly.”

A FRIGHTENING NIGHT

My husband, Dr. James Dobson, and I experienced a shocking “suddenly” on June 16, 1998. We had put in a twelve-hour day at Focus on the Family and the National Day of Prayer. I was too exhausted to cook, so Jim offered to fix me a hamburger.

We were in the kitchen. Jim was assembling the

burger and I was going through the day's mail. Suddenly I heard the burger hit the floor. I glanced up and saw Jim slowly trying to locate the meat with his foot. I said, "Jim, what are you doing?" He didn't answer. I repeated the question, and again he didn't answer.

I looked into Jim's unfocused eyes and realized that he was unable to speak. Then he reached out, put his arms around me, and held me tight.

Panic-stricken, I ran to the phone and dialed 911. Within minutes the paramedics were rushing Jim to

*That began the
most frightening
night of my life.*

the hospital. He had experienced a major stroke. That began the most frightening night of my life, as he underwent two CAT scans and other diagnostic tests. The neurologist then told me about a recently developed medication called tPA that could be very helpful. The downside was that death occurs in about 6 percent of patients who receive it. I had to make the decision whether or not to administer the drug. What a terrifying moment that was!

Knowing that Jim would rather take the chance on wholeness, I decided to authorize the medication. Six other people had to sign the release, which absolved the neurologist and the hospital of liability. The tPA was

administered just forty minutes before the end of the three-hour period beyond which it becomes ineffective. Still, Jim couldn't speak, and his right side was partially paralyzed.

I faced the prospect of losing my beloved husband of nearly four decades, or, if he survived, of helping Jim through years of speech therapy, physical rehabilitation, and medical care. As I drove home from the hospital at 5 A.M., I began praying. I was experiencing one of the greatest challenges to my faith in my entire life. I wondered why the Lord would take away the abilities to write, speak, and create from this gifted man who ministered every day to millions around the world. As Jim had written in one of his books a few years earlier, there are times in our lives when God doesn't appear to make sense. This was certainly one of them for me.

Little did I know that He was about to perform a wonderful miracle for Jim. When the news of Jim's stroke was announced on Focus on the Family's radio program and millions of people around the world began to pray for him, God clearly heard and answered their (and our) petitions. Later that morning, Jim began to say a few words, and by 4 P.M. that day he was essentially over the stroke. He talked in sentences and his strength returned. He suffered no disability, and today, four years later, he is more creative and effective than ever.

Tragedy does not always end this miraculously, even for those who have served the Lord faithfully for many years. God is sovereign, and He does what is best in His eyes. Yet even when the worst occurs from a human perspective, “God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28). Prayer is never unanswered. Sometimes the response is *yes*, sometimes it is *no*, and sometimes it is *wait*. But our heavenly Father is there even in the most troubling of circumstances.

You may have encountered a crisis of your own recently; you may even be in the midst of one right now. When these “suddenlys” strike, they are unnerving reminders of the fragility of our existence.

We all want peaceful lives and contented hearts. Yet with threats to our tranquility growing at a seemingly exponential rate, is it any wonder that many of us succumb to worry and fear? More important, is there a solution? *Can* we know certain peace in these uncertain times?

The answer, of course, is *yes*.

OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH

Though some might christen the twenty-first century the Age of Anxiety, our current troubles are not new. Mankind’s future has always been uncertain. Since the days of Noah and his family, Moses and the nation of

Israel, the persecuted early church, the Pilgrims, and America's founding fathers, the answer for people facing adversity has always been the same: Almighty God.

Simply put, there is no security apart from Him. When problems threaten to engulf us, we must do what believers have always done—turn to the Lord for encouragement and solace. As Psalm 46:1 states, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Because of our pride, or affluence, or independence, or a thousand other reasons, many of us act as if we can get along just fine without the Lord. For years we've put up a sign that says to God, “KEEP OUT! Keep out of our government. Keep out of our communities, businesses, and entertainment. Keep out of our schools. Keep out of our families. Keep out of our lives!”

And God is gracious. He doesn't force His way into places where we have not invited Him. He politely leaves us alone, taking His shield of protection and peace with Him. The psalmist informs us that “the shields of the earth belong to God” (Psalm 47:9, NKJV). When those shields are removed, we face the fury of life's storms on our own.

Yet God does not abandon us. He keeps His promise: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Even during the storms, He stands just to the side, ever watchful, waiting to embrace us

the moment we again seek His presence. His words to Jeremiah apply to us all: “Call to me and I will answer you” (Jeremiah 33:3).

Even better, our Father reveals *how* we are to call upon Him. We can speak directly to heaven through a remarkable gift called prayer.

THE LIFELINE OF PRAYER

I learned to depend on the Lord early in my childhood. During those turbulent years, my mother held our little family together. Though she wasn't a Christian at the time, she knew that she needed all the help she could get as she raised her children. So she sent my brother and me to church every Sunday, and it was there that I was introduced to Jesus Christ and invited Him into my heart.

As I learned how to pray and began speaking to the Lord, I sensed His love and care for me. Amid the chaos of our disintegrating family, this little girl found hope and comfort in Jesus. I've been praying and relying on Him ever since.

The many answers to prayer in my life have reinforced my belief in its power and importance. Prayer is our pathway not only to divine protection, but also to a personal, intimate relationship with God. That's why I am so honored to be in my eleventh year as chairman

of the National Day of Prayer Task Force. I count it a privilege to play a small part in calling people of faith to their knees.

Jesus demonstrated the significance of this intimacy with God to His disciples. He “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). He “went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12). He even told the disciples the parable about justice for the persistent widow “to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).

I have often wondered why the Bible places such a heavy emphasis on prayer, especially since Jesus reminded us during the Sermon on the Mount that “your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:8). When I mentioned this to my husband, his response was both simple and profound: “Well, God desires a *relationship* with each one of us, and there is no relationship in eavesdropping!”

*“There is no
relationship in
eavesdropping!”*



Indeed, the Lord desires a personal, two-way conversation with me—and with you. You are His child. He wants you to seek Him, to love Him, and to spend time daily with Him. When you do, He hears and responds. Jesus said: “When you pray, go into your room, close

the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6).

If Christians would follow through on this truth, we would change our lives and the course of history. After all, just as prayer is important for us as individuals, it is also important to entire nations. One of my favorite Scripture verses is 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

As I reflect on this verse, I am encouraged. Prayer groups are springing up throughout America. Our nation’s leaders are openly asking for prayerful support from the public. As a matter of fact, for the first time in more than a century, members of both houses of Congress met recently in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol for a time of prayer and reconciliation. In the midst of our tumultuous times, God may be preparing hearts for a new openness to seeking Him through the lifeline of prayer.

How about you? Are you ready to renew or increase your own commitment to prayer? Do you want contentment in your heart and peace in your world? If your answer is *yes*—or even *maybe*—I encourage you to keep reading. I will introduce you to the National Day of

Prayer's four-step approach to effective communication with God. It's simple, practical, and biblical. We call it P.R.A.Y.—Praise, Repent, Ask, and Yield.

The apostle Paul urged that “requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone . . . that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:1–3). Let's please God by actively seeking, through prayer, “peaceful and quiet lives”—for ourselves, our spouses, our children and grandchildren, our friends, and our nation.

Are you ready to know certain peace in uncertain times? Good. It's time to P.R.A.Y.

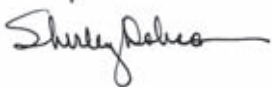
31 days to P.R.A.Y.

Praise. Repent. Ask. Yield. These four simple steps can take our prayers beyond empty words of recitation to the kind of intimate, personal communication that our Lord so desires to have with His children. He is the Master Creator, our Father, the source of all love—and He wants a relationship with us. As we establish a deeper link with God in prayer, we will find the worries and fears of today slipping away. They will be replaced by the love and contentment that is only possible through Him.

I hope that the previous chapters have given you a sense of the joy, hope, and peace that are available to you through prayer. To help you make this approach a habit, I urge you to try the following 31 Days to P.R.A.Y. devotional over the next month. I believe it will enrich your prayer life and bring you closer to the Lord than you ever thought possible.

All God's blessings to you and your family!

Prayerfully yours,



Day One

PERSEVERE IN PRAYER

Jesus once told a story about a widow who repeatedly asked a judge for justice against an adversary:

“For some time [the judge] refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’” And the Lord [Jesus] said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?” (Luke 18:4–7)

Scripture says that Jesus told the disciples this parable to show “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1, KJV). Let us never faint from the privilege of bowing before God in prayer!

P. R. A. Y. FOR TODAY

*Praise God for His patient teaching on prayer;
repent of any “fainting” you’ve done when you’ve
failed to persevere; ask for His help to be faithful
in prayer in the midst of life’s stresses;
yield to Him by joyfully persevering
even when you’re tempted to give up.*

Day Two

GOD'S WILL FOR YOU

Do you realize that you already know God's will for you today? Here it is: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for *this is God's will for you* in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

Prayer is our privilege of constant, unbroken communication with God. We can consistently talk with Him about everything. As Robert L. Thomas says, this continual prayer commanded in the Bible "implies constantly recurring prayer, growing out of a settled attitude of dependence on God. Whether words are uttered or not, lifting the heart to God while one is occupied with miscellaneous duties is the vital thing."

Incessant prayer, says Thomas, is "the only way to cultivate a joyful attitude in times of trial." It's also the best way to stay in tune with the perfect will of God.

P. R. A. Y. FOR TODAY

*Praise God for His making His will so clear;
repent of any failure to be joyful, prayerful,
or thankful; ask for His help in being more
prayer-minded hour by hour;
yield to Him by letting go of any sulking
resistance to joy or thankfulness.*

Endnotes

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