

HE  
HOLDS  
*my*  
HAND

EXPERIENCING  
GOD'S  
PRESENCE &  
PROTECTION

CAROL KENT

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*my*  
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*He Holds My Hand: Experiencing God's Presence and Protection*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Have* you ever received an unexpected phone call that completely threw your world off its axis? It might have been a devastating diagnosis of cancer. Perhaps it was the shocking news of an accident that took the life of a family member and left someone else you love permanently disabled. But sometimes, unexpected calls bring magnificent surprises. You might have received good news about an upcoming wedding, or the announcement that a long-awaited baby is on the way. Or maybe you were offered a job or ministry position ideally suited to your gifts. Good or bad, in one moment in time, you knew your life would be forever changed by what you just heard. That's what happened to me.

The phone rang at 12:35 a.m., awakening my husband and me from a deep sleep. Gene picked up the receiver while I tried to figure out who was on the other end of the line. His face was horror-stricken as he looked at me and said, "Jason has just been arrested for the murder of his wife's ex-husband."

Nausea swept over me. I struggled to get out of bed and stand up, but my legs wouldn't hold my weight. I slumped to the floor and crawled my way into the bathroom. Thoughts swirled: *What is happening? Our son has never been in trouble before. He was a good student, a high-achieving graduate of the US Naval Academy. Did they pick up the wrong person? Is this a bad dream? Or a cruel joke?*

Soon after our son's graduation from the USNA, he had met a woman with two young daughters. We were all thrilled when they got married, and Jason loved being a husband and stepdad. Still, something unforeseen hovered on the horizon. The girls' biological father had been accused of abuse on multiple occasions, and these allegations had prevented him from having unsupervised visitation privileges. The abuse was never proven, but Jason firmly believed it was true.

Jason's first military assignment outside the continental United States was in Hawaii, which meant he, his wife, and his stepdaughters would be living far away from the girls' biological father. To complicate matters, the visitation restrictions for the girls' father were likely going to be lifted. If that happened, they would have six weeks of mandatory visits with their dad in the summer. Jason, fearing for the girls' safety, began to unravel mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Then he did the unthinkable—he took matters into his own hands.

Grief consumed me, and I was deeply distraught with God. As a teenager, I had memorized Psalm 16:11, vowing to follow God wherever He led me: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (KJV). Now I was not feeling either joy or God's pleasure as I lashed out at Him. "How could You have allowed this to happen? I prayed for my son since he was in my womb. I tried to be the best mother I could be, raising my son to love and serve You! He was a loving husband and father who wanted to protect his stepdaughters from abuse. I am heartbroken. This is my only child, and You didn't stop him!"

Following seven postponements of his trial, Jason was convicted of murder and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. (You can read the whole story in my book *When I Lay My Isaac Down*.) All the while, I wrestled with how to go on with life, how to reconcile what I knew to be true—that God is good and trustworthy—with the fact that even though He knew my son's heartfelt reason for his actions, God did not intervene and prevent this heinous crime.

In the middle of my sorrow, I turned to the place I had always gone for comfort—the Bible. For decades, I had been in Christian leadership—first as a teaching leader in Bible Study Fellowship and

then as a speaker at Christian conferences—and I had seen women come to faith in God and grow closer to Him as they immersed themselves in His Word. Could I find the personal solace I needed in its pages now? In the beginning, it was hard to read, partly because I was still mad at God, and partly because my tears blurred the words. Still, I was desperate to hear His voice, and I longed for answers.

As time passed, I started to read a verse or passage and then would stop to think about what God was saying to me. In the past I had always read the Bible in a hurry because my life was busy and I didn't think I had time to ponder the Scriptures. But now, desperate to hear His voice, I intentionally paused long enough to comprehend the life-giving words He was speaking into me.

I soon discovered that the best way for me to “listen” to God's voice was to meditate on Scripture and then write out what I believed was His prayer over my life. And it comforted me. It was as if God took me by the hand, as a father would guide a child, and gently led me in the direction of unconditional love, renewed hope, and fresh faith. The more I read His Word and sought to understand what He was saying to me, the more comfort I experienced and the more my intimacy with Him was restored. Some of the prayers you'll read in this book were written during that difficult time.

Each day's selection begins with a relevant quotation, followed by a prayer, and ends with a Scripture verse or passage. I allowed myself literary freedom by creating these prayers in God's voice. However, the only part of each day's prayer that has the authority of God is the quoted and referenced verses from the Bible. Writing as if God were actually speaking is a way to hear His words of hope and blessing over you. It is with a sense of holy awe and reverence for Him that I've prayerfully written these entries. I have sought to present God's truth

in each prayer, but only His words are absolute Truth. Whenever words included in the prayer are drawn directly from the Bible, they are in italics, with the complete Scripture included at the end.

My goal is not to provide all the answers to your tough questions, but to remind you that God holds your hand—in every situation. At His right hand there are eternal pleasures (Psalm 16:11), even in the middle of your darkest experience. Read this devotional as a complement to your regular Bible reading. Keep your Bible open as you read, and look for additional insights in the verses that capture your heart.

I pray that you'll experience the Bible in a more personalized way than ever before. As you read each day's Scripture, pause and listen to what you hear Him saying to you as you apply His truth to your daily life. Then try writing it out, making sure your notations are in line with God's truth and His character. He *does* hold your hand—and He won't let go.

— January 1 —  
A NEW BEGINNING

God is able to accomplish, provide, help, save, keep, subdue. . . . He is able to do what you can't. He already has a plan. . . . God's not bewildered. Go to him.

*Max Lucado*



*It's a brand-new year, and there is much to do. As you look at all of your responsibilities and personal challenges, life may feel overwhelming and impossible. Your usual ability to engage in normal activities has been slowed due to unforeseen difficult circumstances. But I am a God who delights in giving new beginnings and restored hope. If you'd like a chance to start over this year, try praying: *God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.* And I will listen. If you make Me your main priority and ask Me for wisdom about how to make good choices, I'll provide discernment and guidance as you move forward. You are not alone. I know your name and I cherish you. If you take My hand, I will walk with you and provide light for the journey ahead.*

*God, make a fresh start in me,  
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.*

PSALM 51:10, MSG

— January 2 —  
LET GO OF WORRY

Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength—carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time. Worrying doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.

*Corrie ten Boom*



You've been stressed and anxious about future events. There are work concerns and family issues, along with financial challenges. It's hard to concentrate on what you have to do today, because you already know the week ahead is filled with impossible situations—and you're not sure what you should do. You feel the weight of uncertainty, and it's too heavy for you to bear.

Instead of worrying, talk to Me. I love to respond to your requests. *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.* Worrying about what hasn't happened yet and about what might never happen is fruitless and only robs you of the strength you have today. You will find Me if you look for Me, and I will provide all you need in perfect timing. I am never late.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;  
knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks  
receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks,  
the door will be opened.*

MATTHEW 7:7-8, NIV

— January 3 —  
REMEMBRANCE

Remember your own history with God. Think back on the times when God expressed his love for you. . . . Remember the love you felt for him, the joy, the tears? Remember how he touched you, embraced you, and led you?

*Ken Gire*



*My* child, you've been focusing on My past blessings in your life. When you felt My favor on your close relationships and life's work, you had a sense of deep contentment and satisfaction. But life is harder now—less predictable, and more difficult to figure out. You've had the fleeting thought that I've been distracted and that I'm not aware of your challenges. But I'm in the same place I've always been—right beside you. The fact that you can't see Me doesn't mean I've left. Even when you think I'm the most absent, I am ever present, so close that I'm aware of every breath you take.

Pause, breathe deeply, and remember our experiences together in the past. List the times when you felt comfort and peace in My company, and then list the times when you were no longer aware of My presence. Remember Moses? I appeared to him in a burning bush and told him he was standing on holy ground. Listen to My voice. Wherever I am is holy ground, including right here, where you are. Never forget that.

*“Do not come any closer,” the LORD warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.”*

EXODUS 3:5

— January 4 —  
WAITING

Waiting on God requires the willingness to bear uncertainty, to carry within oneself the unanswered question, lifting the heart to God about it whenever it intrudes upon one's thoughts.

*Elisabeth Elliot*



*I* want you to learn the benefits of perseverance. Sometimes you think I move too slowly, and your agenda seems more important than what you'll learn in the process of waiting. But hold on; be patient (Psalm 27:14). When you think I'm not responding to your prayer, I am already in the process of giving you an answer—just not the response you were looking for. I am choosing to be glorified in a different way than you anticipated.

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life.* While you wait for your answer to prayer, read My Word; listen to My voice through Scripture, through the wise counsel of people who spend time with Me, and through the inner impression of your heart as you seek My guidance. Your unanswered questions will draw you close to Me—and that's a good place to be.

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a  
dream fulfilled is a tree of life.*

PROVERBS 13:12

— January 5 —  
STRENGTH

God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as his chisel for sculpting our lives. Felt weakness deepens dependence on Christ for strength each day. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually.

*J. I. Packer*



You are stronger than you think because you belong to Me. On the surface, you feel weak, unable to cope, filled with apprehension, and uncertain about how to make important choices. You face decisions that won't wait until the road you're traveling has smoothed out. There's a mystery about the way I work that I long for you to understand: When you feel powerless and doubt your ability to handle simple decision making, that's when you can hang your weakness on My strength.

Pause and understand the mystery of My strength in your weakness. When you are at your lowest ebb, you're more inclined to surrender your will to Me because you know you can't survive without My help. The moment you admit, "I can't make it on my own. I'm hanging on to You, God; You're all I have," that's when My power works best on your behalf. Develop a daily habit of speaking this verse aloud: *I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*

*I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

— January 6 —  
PRAISE WORKS

The climax of God's happiness is the delight He takes in the echoes  
of His excellence in the praises of His people.

*John Piper*



It's early in the year, and I challenge you to establish a new habit, beginning today. Start praising Me. You don't have to be in a quiet place or even alter the schedule of your day. When you are alone, speak out loud to Me with words of praise. I inhabit the praises of My people (Psalm 22:3, kjv). As you focus on Me, your spirits will be lifted and your heart encouraged.

Begin by speaking My names and My attributes—Abba Father, Holy One, Redeemer, Healer, Protector, Savior, Comforter, Creator, the Great I AM, the God for whom nothing is impossible, the One who is altogether lovely, your Hope, your Strength, your Fortress, He who is present everywhere, all-powerful and all-knowing, the One who is just, the One who forgives, the One who loves you. Pour out your praise to Me and be amazed at how much you become aware of My presence in your circumstances. I will be all of those things to you and much more. Change your focus to Me and allow your heart to break free from any discouragement.

*Let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God,  
proclaiming our allegiance to his name.*

HEBREWS 13:15

— January 7 —  
FINDING PURPOSE

Purpose in life is not just something we do. It involves who we are and our way of being in the world. . . . Our heart is broken by what breaks God's heart, and we devote our energies to those purposes.

*Jan Johnson*



Take a moment to look back on your life—to a time when you found a purpose for living, a goal that made your life relevant and meaningful. There is great fulfillment when you do what I've designed you to do. You discover unexpected joy even when the work is hard, if you understand the reason why it's important. I created you to be different from every other person on the earth, and you'll find your deepest satisfaction when you use your gifts for My glory.

Lately it's been hard to rediscover your purpose because of the disheartening conditions you face. But obstacles become stepping-stones when you say yes to temporary discomfort in order to walk in the path I've designed for you. Sometimes I give you choices—but they will always be in accordance with My Word. I never go against My Word.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD.*

*“They are plans for good and not for disaster,  
to give you a future and a hope.”*

JEREMIAH 29:11