

P.S.  
it's gonna  
be good

HOW GOD'S WORD ANSWERS  
OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT  
FAITH, FEAR & ALL THE THINGS

Heidi Lee Anderson

There is no one I'd rather have answer my questions about the Bible than Heidi. Her heart, her passion, and her knowledge shine in *P.S. It's Gonna Be Good*. My advice is to sink in and soak in every word of this book. P.S. You won't regret it.

**AMY WEATHERLY**, bestselling author of *I'll Be There (But I'll Be Wearing Sweatpants)* and cofounder of the wildly popular Sister I Am With You

Heidi highlights the questions many of us are asking about faith and answers them by pointing us back to Truth. Through biblical story, candor, and a ton of humor, she reminds us that God writes the best stories (they're really, really good). This is a must-read for any woman wanting to see what Scripture has to say about #allthethings burning in her heart.

**REBECCA GEORGE**, author of *Do the Thing* and host of the *Radical Radiance* podcast

If you're facing a situation that you can't control or fighting a battle that seems hard to win, God is going to use this book in your life. With her fun and conversational style, allow Heidi Lee Anderson to get you into God's Word, remind you of His promises, and prepare you for the battle you face.

**JASON STRAND**, senior pastor at Eagle Brook Church

I found myself both deeply moved and equally challenged as I read *P.S. It's Gonna Be Good*. Heidi has a way of drawing the reader in with her wit and charm, and then immerses them with biblical narrative and truth. She takes questions every person has asked themselves at one point or another and draws out answers by looking at Scripture in fresh ways. Heidi is the real deal, and her writing matches her authentic pursuit of God. I highly recommend this book!

**JOHN ALEXANDER**, teaching pastor/executive director of creative arts at Eagle Brook Church

Each of us will reach a point in life when it feels like we have more questions than answers. The what-ifs and how-tos and why-mes can threaten to overwhelm us, especially when everything seems to be falling apart. Heidi Lee Anderson knows this well, and she also knows who stands ready to answer our questions and carry us through as we trust in Him. This delightful journey through God's Word will have you laughing, nodding, crying, and praising the Lord for His goodness! If you need some encouragement, a few chuckles, and soul-deep refreshment, then you're holding the right book in your hands.

**NAOMI VACARO**, founder of the Wholehearted ministry and author of *Quiet*

Powerful yet practical, Heidi has written a powerful survival guide for the seasons of questioning and doubt. This book is a road map—and a must-read—if you're anything like me and have found yourself wrestling with your faith and struggling with doubt, fear, or insecurity.

**JORDAN LEE DOOLEY**, national bestselling author of *Own Your Everyday* and *Embrace Your Almost*

Many times throughout our lives, we face circumstances that find us questioning. Our faith can waver, and we may wonder if God will come through this time. In *P.S. It's Gonna Be Good*, Heidi Lee Anderson invites us to face the hard stuff of life head-on and discover how a sovereign God won't only show up, but He's been there all along. With Heidi's signature way of making ancient Bible stories relate to our modern everyday lives in a very powerful and practical way, this book is a must-read!

**RUTH SCHWENK**, blogger, podcaster, and author of the bestselling devotional *Trusting God in All the Things*

*P.S. It's Gonna Be Good* is the book we all need for the real questions we face every day. Heidi is a great guide with her humor and deep

understanding of trusting God through hard things. You will find encouragement and strength to press on in trusting God is always good.

**ASHLEY MORGAN JACKSON**

You're not the only one lying awake at night endlessly scrolling social media in an effort to distract yourself from the hard thing you're facing. And you're definitely not the only one wondering if it's all *really* going to be okay. News flash: It's going to be more than okay—it's gonna be GOOD. In the pages of this book, Heidi meets us right in the middle of life's biggest what ifs and hands us a cup of coffee with the promise that God is with us and working ALL things for our good. Get ready for your hope to be renewed and for your sides to ache—Heidi will have you laughing for days!

**ABBIE CAPPA**, pastor's wife

Truth coupled with laughter is a great combo and always how you bring it, Heidi! Remember: Nothing is ever truly fatal—God wins every time!

**DAN STOLTZ**, proud dad, president/CEO of Spire Credit Union

Do yourself a favor and get this book! With the credibility of a cancer survivor and the biblical understanding of a scholar, Heidi encourages, inspires, and gives hope. This book is for anyone who has wondered if God is really making something beautiful out of the hard stuff. Through these pages, you will feel like you're drinking coffee with your best friend and she is giving your soul a hug. Bible teaching, encouragement, and even humor—all wrapped into the pages of *P.S. It's Gonna Be Good*. Heidi's words will bless the weary heart deeply.

**MOLLY DEFRANK**, author of *Digital Detox: The Two-Week Tech Reset for Kids*

We've all been there. We've all had those moments (or years) of feeling down, discouraged, and just straight-up disappointed in life. We've become disillusioned in our faith and wondered where in the world God is. If that describes you at all . . . you're in the right place. Heidi has done a fantastic job of bringing biblical truth and hope to the hard places of life. This is a book every woman needs! If you desire to thrive (not simply survive), grab a copy and dig in.

**BETHANY BEAL**, cofounder of Girl Defined Ministries and author of *Girl Defined: God's Radical Design for Beauty, Femininity, and Identity*

The book everyone needs to read! No matter who you are or what you're going through, I promise there's something for you. Heidi not only addresses the hard fear questions we're asking—while bringing it to life with perfectly woven-in humor—but also provides a solution to each! A passionate, biblically sound pursuit of faith over fear.

**ARIEL TYSON**, author of *Chase the Roar*, speaker, Instagram and TikTok content creator @arielctyson, pastor's wife, entrepreneur

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*To Ty, Oscar, Mabel, Hazel, and Dottie,  
My literal walking reminders that God alone holds the final word  
and has such good plans up His sleeve.*

*No matter what's ahead, always be assured:  
I love you, and P.S. It's gonna be good.\**

*\*Unless you never grow out of toilet humor . . .  
then I can make no promises.  
(Mainly talking about the kids, Ty.)*





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## INTRODUCTION

**W**hat's your deepest, darkest, biggest fear of all time? Oops, sorry. Are we not there yet? Maybe I should back-track. Introductions usually involve some sort of surface-level pleasantries, right? "Hi, I'm Heidi. What's your name?" may have been more polite. Now that I think of it, "What's your favorite color?" would've been safe too. Mine's brown; what's yours? *Is that weird? Did things just get weird again?*

Forget it. I'm not here to beat around the bush or talk color palettes (although *I have heard* brown pairs well with pasty-white redheads #itme). My guess is you aren't either. We're here to talk about faith and fear and *how in the world* God expects us to choose one when the other (I'm looking at you, dread-anxiety-doubt-disappointment-and-panic) seems to always be present.

You fill in the blank: Life was all butterflies and rainbows until

---

Until the doctor delivered the hard diagnosis, your parents filed for divorce, that relationship fell apart, or a certain disappointment came out of nowhere. Maybe you lost a close family member, faced an unforeseen financial hardship, floundered in a dead-end job, heard the news of a miscarriage, or got blindsided by a car accident. Whatever it may be, that *thing* you faced? Good grief, girlfriend—you were thrown quite the curveball!

And as a result?

As much as you *try* to think positive, your thoughts are consumed with what-if scenarios, which only spur on more questions. You *know* the value of seeing the glass at least half-full, for sure, but you've (kind of) become a master at imagining the worst-case instead. And while a once-blank future used to be exciting, the unknown is, well, paralyzing to say the least. Let's shoot straight—if God let *that* bad thing happen, who's to say He won't allow *another* bad thing to barge on in and crash down your whole world?

I get it.

I get *you*. I know how you once felt strong, happy, and free, but now you just feel anxious and tanked. A little disappointed and unsure. Sometimes even helpless (or dare I say, hopeless?). And you're *sick of it*. Fed up, over it, snapping your fingers at it. While you've heard it all—"Pray about it! Let go and let God! Don't worry because He won't give you more than you can handle!"—and it all *sounds good and you want to* . . . well, you're left, blinking hard with sagged shoulders and unanswered questions, wondering HOW IN THE WORLD, THOUGH?

Because you've done that! Prayed around the clock, scattered Bible verses around your house, cranked worship music on high, and set out every day to trust the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind . . .

Except then the doctor calls with another piece of bad news. A friend disappoints you. Your kid plunges further into depression. The government continues to pass weird laws. Your neighbor's dog acts as if your yard is his personal dumping ground. Natural disasters strike again. Racial tension and the nation's climate are not where anyone hopes them to be.

Oh, and your toddler just smeared poop all over the carpet, cut their own hair into a mullet, and dumped a bowl of Cheerios on the baby's head—all while you stepped out of the house to check the mail and found yet another unexpected bill you can't pay.

Did I mention you found a gray hair this morning? (*Stays between you and me, of course.*)

Let's be real: Woman to woman, WE'RE KIND OF FREAKING OUT. Instead of seeing God's hand, experiencing His peace, and feeling confident in His good plans, we see anything *but* that. As much as we *try* to choose faith above fear, doubt, insecurities, and discouragement, we're rattled again. Anxious beyond belief. Straight-up disappointed. Unsteady in our soul. Being jerked back and forth on this roller coaster of life when all we want to do is get off, find a bench in the shade, sit in some peace and quiet, and just *be free*.

As much as we try to choose faith above fear, doubt, insecurities, and discouragement, we're rattled again.

Would it be asking too much for some cotton candy too?  
#tellmeyoureamomwithouttellingmeyoureamom

“Did I steal your diary” you ask? Call your mom? Hack into the government’s surveillance-camera footage through your webcam, Alexa, or smartphone? *Or hoooooow do I know your life?*

Because this is *my* life. The whole reason I picked up a pen to write this book is because I’ve had to battle against fear, anxious thoughts, and worst-case scenarios since one particular day back in January 2012.

I’ll never forget sitting on that crinkly white paper and looking over at the doctor scanning my chart. “You have Hodgkin’s Lymphoma.”

At age 23, with no family history of cancer (or any disease really), here I was, thrown the biggest curveball of my life. It was so unexpected that I looked over at my mom sitting in one of the chairs across from me and asked, “What even is that?” *When are we too old to bring our mom everywhere we go? #askingforafriend\**

I remember her nodding, explaining that it’s cancer. My whole body turned ice-cold.

Have you ever been there? Not necessarily hearing a cancer diagnosis—although maybe. But have you ever found yourself in a situation far beyond your control with the future so bleak and the unknown so scary?

---

\* #butreallyaskingforme

Maybe, like me, you knew Jesus as your Savior, but it wasn't until *that moment* you desperately felt in need of His saving. Or maybe you didn't know Christ, and with nowhere to go, it felt like life was just . . . over.

There I sat, three weeks out from meeting with the oncologist . . .

Did you audibly gasp too? Augh, I know. Waiting is the absolute worst, isn't it? Not just waiting to hear the cancer staging, the treatment plan, or even the prognosis, but waiting in *all of life*.

Waiting for your house to sell, a godly man to come along, your spouse to land a job after he was let go, or that positive pregnancy test after you miscarried the last time. Because it's in this place where the enemy can really pick you apart, whisper every what-if, worst-case scenario into your ear, and aim those flaming darts right where it hurts—with the intention, of course, of making you feel utterly helpless and your situation completely hopeless.

Did I mention he's cruel? (Rhetorical, but just in case: Yeah, he's pretty ruthless.)

But here's where we call a time-out—because, girlfriend? Those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior are *not* without hope, and we certainly are *not* without help. This God of ours not only reigns victorious today, but can you believe it? In Romans 8:37, He deems *us* more than conquerors too! Oh, and earlier in this very same chapter, He also assures He'll work all things for His glory and our good. (Note: Not just some things or most—but *all*. #praisehandsemoji)

Sounds pretty absolute, doesn't it? No matter how many disappointing, scary, or painful fiery darts are launched into the pathway of our lives, they must still all bow in submission to God's prevailing good plans that can never be thwarted.

Oops, I just spoiled the ending! (Although the book of Revelation kind of already did that, right?)

Back to my story. In the months following the diagnosis of stage 2 cancer, with chemotherapy and radiation as the game plan, I pulled out clumps of my hair and mastered putting on a wig. I walked around with

a port lodged in my chest while also going through the motions at work. I screamed in the middle of the night when treatment had an adverse effect, then met up with friends the next morning.

So my fears today? They all stem from that experience.

For instance . . . *fun fact*: With radiation to the chest, breast cancer is a common second cancer.

Want a couple more? I love me some trivia too. The warning label on one of the chemotherapy drugs said it could result in cardiac arrest or heart failure in my forties, and oh, apparently radiation kills cancer cells in the moment but tends to grow them in the future. Not to mention, if you have cancer once, you run a higher risk in general of getting it again. SUPER FUN, RIGHT? I think that was just the first page of warnings in the packet I signed in order to receive treatment. #goodtimes

While dealing with cancer—or your divorce, miscarriage, debt, or a cold marriage—in the heat of the moment is no walk in the park, the enemy doesn't stop there. He would love nothing more than for us to battle fear then *for the rest of our lives*. Because no matter how many years you're in remission from that one cancer—and no matter how much time has passed since your trauma, disappointment, or heartache—there's a whole legion of other deadly diseases knocking at the door down the road. A whole slew of opportunities for that to resurface again. I mean, Jesus HIMSELF said troubles are a-comin'.

Yikes, is this a little much? Did I scare you off?

I'm officially terrible at introductions.

Here's what I'm trying to get at: Every unknown symptom, every doctor appointment I head into (even just routine), and every mole, bump, rash, or bodily change in myself, my kids, and my husband? I overanalyze and become quite anxious over it. (Verdict's still out, but I'm unsure if Ty enjoys waking up in the middle of the night to a flashlight beaming in his face as I'm taking pictures of his moles. Obviously just to track any progress in growth, but by his reaction, he seems to interpret it differently? #hestherealMVP)



So, me? A master at choosing faith over fear, doubt, and well, ALL THE THINGS? You *must* be able to hear my family belly-laughing across the page.

But good news: This book isn't about me.

This book is about the Author of our lives, who “has given us everything we need for living a godly life” (2 Peter 1:3), including His Word, which is “useful to teach us what is true” (2 Timothy 3:16).

When we want answers to our questions, peace in our trials, hope in the unknown, confident faith in times of doubt, and rest when our hearts beat wildly, we don't have to freak out, wondering what to do next or where to go from here.

Instead, we can open up the Book of Life and hear from the Lord Almighty Himself—and when we do, we will “know the truth, and the truth will set [us] *free*” (John 8:32, italics added). Ah, yes. There it is. That one thing we've so desperately been wanting.

### **Freedom.**

When we lie awake at night worrying, overwhelmed by the circumstances of today, haunted by the pain of yesterday, and paralyzed by the fear of what tomorrow may bring, Jesus' invitation to freedom is not elusive nor out of reach. It's actually clear as day, within arm's reach—or rather, laid out in the palms of our hands.

When we open up our Bibles and step outside of our story, immersing ourselves in *His* story, we'll not only discover the pathway He's already laid out for us to seize that promised free, abundant life. We'll in fact see how He's been offering it this entire time.

But first, you know that saying “Stop comparing your behind-the-scenes with everyone else's highlight reel”?

We might've been doing *just fine*, but then we hop on Instagram scrolling past people with their big platforms and houses, flashy jobs and sculpted bodies. While we're over here with an inner tube around our stomach, going to a job that barely pays the bills, and looking around at

our messy home, messy bun, messy life . . . well, it doesn't take much or long to feel *just a tad* jealous.

But guess what? That comparison trap isn't limited to just social media, your friends, or the Joneses down the street. We can trip over the same thing every time we open the Bible.

Like when Joshua prays for the sun to stand still, and *it actually does?*

Peter asks Jesus to let him walk on water, and *he in fact gets to?*

Elijah calls fire to fall from heaven, and *he lives to tell the tale?*

Pit that against our ordinary days, and it's hard to imagine, right? While we're washing dishes, David's slaying giants. While we're grumbling over a workout, Deborah's leading a charge into battle. And while we're struggling over our kid's homework (which, P.S. Please Jesus, never take us back to the throes of distance learning), Paul's penning half the New Testament . . . in prison . . . *with JOY. #yougottabekiddingme*

I'm sorry, but THESE are supposed to be our examples? Like for regular, average, modern-day people?

Yep.

And God, all-knowing as He is, knew we'd question it. So James nipped it in the bud: "Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!" (James 5:17).

Here's the deal. If we took the time to become familiar with Bible heroes' backstories before zeroing in on their highlight reels, maybe we wouldn't be so surprised after all.

Maybe we would in fact recognize that same fear, doubt, discouragement, and overwhelming stress *we* feel was also felt by these Bible characters. That unknown future with the big question marks ahead? Maybe it's not unique to us but part of their lives too. And if the God who met them there, never left their side, and showered them with peace and reassurance and purpose and guidance is the same yesterday as He is today? Well then, how He used their ordinary to do something extraordinary is maybe, just maybe, what He'd like to do for us, too.

In fact, I know He would. Scripture lays it all out in black-and-white (and sometimes red)—and we will see it for ourselves in the pages ahead.

In each chapter, we're going to follow one Bible hero as if we're tagging along right beside them, stepping into their footsteps, and looking around at the scene of their stories in real time as if we were there too. We will feel all their feels, hear what God has to say, and watch how God moved. Along the way, we'll discover what He's said, intended, promised, and reassured—since the beginning of time.

Not just to them, but to us as well.

How *they chose faith* in a prison cell, in a lions' den, and at their own brother's funeral is also how *we can choose faith* while shackled in our own chains, hearing our culture's roar, and crying at the tomb of what should've been.

All in all, if they chose faith in the midst of fear, bad news, and questions pending, then by golly, WE CAN TOO. But, like . . . how? I *thought you'd never ask*. Beyond just vague inspiration or any feel-good notion, at the end of each chapter, we'll find that practical, tangible HOW principle each Bible hero shows us.

While we're sitting in the middle of our stories with no idea how they're going to play out, the Author of our lives has already written the ending.

The best part? The promise of this whole book and the one overarching *His*? While we're sitting in the middle of our stories with no idea how they're going to play out, the Author of our lives has already written the ending. Someday we will see—just like these Bible heroes did—that . . .

*It's gonna be good.* Romans 8:28 assures us of that, and if we truly believe those four words as absolute truth that can never be shaken, changed, or muddied regardless of what we face, well then . . . it'll change our whole lives.

Are you feeling battle ready yet? Maybe you're looking down at the same jiggers you've worn for *days*, a mug of lukewarm coffee or tea

in hand, and feeling far from fired up. Your motivation is completely zapped, the question marks are too much, and the last thing you want to do is muster an ounce of energy to get off the couch.

Perfect. We don't fight from our strength anyway. We, in fact, pick up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and get to work from there—all in Christ alone.

Remember: The Bible explicitly tells us in Ephesians 6 that the very arrows shot into our lives meant to *keep us* from choosing faith can all be extinguished once we *choose* faith.

Do you see the irony there? Every last dart meant to derail your faith? Fizzles when you take up the shield of faith.<sup>1</sup>

So lift up your chin, sweet girl. If the Son has set you free, you're free indeed. Jesus Christ already paid the price for every iniquity, but too many of us (*100% me included*) have allowed ourselves to be chained back up *unnecessarily*. But Jesus came so that we may have life and have it free and abundantly (John 10:10)—*and we're going to find it*.

You ready now? Great. Pick up your sword, hold up the shield of faith, and go ahead and turn this page—all while adding another day in those joggers to the tally. *#day4forme*

Make no mistake: In Christ, you are *battle ready*. Want to get started? Me too. *Let's do this thang, girlfriend.*



*Chapter 1*

# DID GOD REALLY SAY . . . ?

*Eve*

**I**magine for a second all your favorite things together in one place. What comes to mind?

Maybe, like me, you immediately picture sitting with your husband, actually drinking coffee while it's hot, with your kids giggling in the background. Maybe you hear waves crashing on the beach, feel the warm afternoon sun hitting your face, and a nap without an alarm is about to go down. Or maybe you're laughing so hard with a circle of friends that you're choking on your latte and you have to cross your legs. #iykyk

Now imagine this moment extending without end. Your coffee doesn't get cold, and your kids are never *once* tempted to pinch the underside of each other's arms. You don't have to dread flying home or groan about getting back to the grind, and you've laughed for so long that you're standing in one big puddle—from the tears, latte, or you know what. Doesn't even matter. You're RIDING HIGH on endorphins, and all is well in the world.

This is the place we're going to start. Because these moments of bliss, peace, and joy? Where we're enjoying life to the maximum, basking in the beauty of creation, totally committed and engaged in life-giving relationships, and just never wanting it all to end? This is when we get a glimpse of heaven and what the Garden of Eden must've been like.

If you love to dance? Imagine flossing without your hip popping out. *#goals*

Enjoy gardening? Get ready to grow broccoli the size of your face—with no fear of it rotting, dying, or drooping.

Animal lover? Gear up because it's one big petting zoo. Animals will be so tame that the leopard will lie down with the goat, and you can shove your hand into a nest of deadly snakes and walk away unharmed. (Anticipating your question: Will we actually *want* to do this? To be fair, unsure—just reiterating Isaiah 11:8. But I'm guessing those of our children who scaled kitchen cupboards and shelves without fear will find it *exhilarating*.)

And lastly but most importantly, all your fear, disappointment, and unease? Gone. Vanquished. Permanently out of sight, forever out of mind, no longer an option or temptation, and eternally overcome.

So hold on to *this* mental picture, okay? Because that's how the world began and the direction we're going too, but it's also here in this first Garden we're introduced to our new BFF Eve.

As we step into Genesis 3 and look around at everything that happened in the first week of all time, we see God already spoke the world into motion, breathed the breath of life into man, performed the first surgery, created Eve from Adam's rib, and planted a blooming garden where His image-bearers dwelled. (All within a few days' time like NBD . . . *what did you do this last week? LOL.*)

These two pranced around naked without the shame or annoyance of thunder thighs, a jiggly midsection, or, for the ladies, the dreaded C-section shelf. She didn't even know it yet, but girlfriend's got it *made!*

But then one day, a slimy serpent slithered onto the scene. (*Psst, it was Satan.*)

Notice: As part of the original creation, snakes had been around since day six. But being as shrewd as he was, he didn't slink into the picture when Eve was strolling on her daily walk around the block with God. He didn't wriggle his way in between Adam and Eve as they sat down for dinner, table for two, feasting on their prizewinning tomatoes.

No, his timing was strategic. He waited *specifically* until the woman was alone, and *that's* the moment he crawled on over.

We see the same tactic today. It has been widely observed that when young people spend too much time isolated, they experience worse mental health outcomes, increased substance abuse, and elevated suicidal ideation.<sup>1</sup> Swing over to the other side of the pendulum, in long-term care facilities. AARP reports, "Isolation and loneliness are associated with a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia, a 32 percent increased risk of stroke, and a nearly fourfold increased risk of death among heart failure patients."<sup>2</sup>

Yet when we read all of this, we aren't that surprised, right? We don't need studies or researchers to tell us something we ourselves have already experienced. *Is it too soon to talk about 2020?*

Maybe you're a Christian on a secular campus and you spend many Friday nights alone in your dorm room. You know exactly how loneliness feels. Maybe everyone else has married off, and you're the last single adult in your circle. You know what isolation does. Or maybe you've recently moved to a new town with no friends or familiar faces. The seclusion is enough to make you cry yourself to sleep, and you're tempted to maul the mail carrier with a bear hug EVERY. STINKIN. DAY. (*I say just do it.*)

How did God word it? Oh yeah. "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18), and to be clear: God wasn't calling Adam out for being thirsty! This was a blanket statement for all mankind. We weren't made to do this life alone. Quite the contrast—being made in the image of the Trinity, we were *created* for community.



Yes, even the introverts.

100% of the teenagers who slam their doors.

And believe it or not, even that friend who leaves your texts on Read but forgets to respond 99% of the time. #towhomitmayconcernimsorry

Even Jesus' last prayer before He was arrested and crucified was for all believers across all of time to be united—repeating this desire that we “may be one” just as the Father is in Him and He is in the Father (John 17:20-23).

It just makes sense then, doesn't it? If God's heart is for us to be united and in community, then the enemy's intent is to divide and isolate. And if the enemy is on the loose and described by God as a roaring lion on the prowl looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8), well then, he's not going to pounce at us without strategy. He's going to hold off until we're most vulnerable . . .

He's going to wait to attack until we're alone.

I'm no zoologist, but with all the National Geographic books my son has had me read, I might as well be. Case in point: Do you know how lions hunt their prey? I'll save you the Google search. They don't burst onto the scene without planning or scheming. Known as efficient, strategic hunters, they stalk their dinner first—staying hidden *as long as possible*. As they creep closer and closer, fixating on their meal's every move, they aren't impatient, but they wait until *the most opportune time* to pounce.<sup>3</sup> When the prey is facing away from them and can't see the charge coming—this is when they attack.

On the other hand, how do zebras protect themselves? Their speed and bodacious legs factor in, sure—but did you know it's their community that saves them? They rely on each other's eyes, ears, and nostrils to alert one another when they sense a predator. And when they run together, the black-and-white stripes make it hard for lions to single out any individual.<sup>4</sup>

When you and I stand united—linking arms in truth, prayer, and faith, and living lives marked by His stripes (Isaiah 53:5)—our enemy

has a harder time singling any of us out to take us down. On our own, we're an easy dinner. Together, we are a force to be reckoned with.

Oh, one more thing. Lions often follow the same hunting patterns over and over. If they're successful from the right wing once, they'll usually saunter over to the right side again when mealtime comes around.<sup>5</sup>

So while they're crafty, they're not necessarily *creative*.

To wrap up this bioscience lesson: As we first meet the enemy in Genesis 3 and watch this roaring lion take the form of a slimy serpent, pay attention to his strategy. He waited until Eve was alone.

Fast-forward to Matthew 4, and . . . *well, well, well*, what do we have here? (Okay, yes—the Sunday school answer works, as always. Jesus is in fact there.)

But take a closer look. Who is that slithering onto the scene as we find Jesus *alone*?

*Exactly.* Same lion, same hunting pattern.

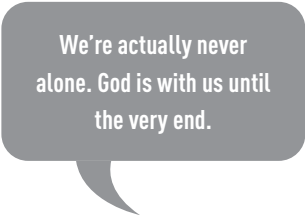
Remember how he waited to approach Eve? When Jesus was in the wilderness, the devil didn't speak *a word* until after Jesus had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Do you know what that means? Girl, if I go a morning without my cup of coffee? I? I *even miss snack time, which I pretend is just for the kids*? Or, worst-case, if I find my cupboards without any sign of chocolate? I'm hangry. A headache is a given, of course. But it snowballs into such a desperate, ravenous rage that I'll Pac-Man anything. Stale bag of chips? Gone. That chocolate baking bar? Chomped through like a Hershey's bar. Easter candy from who knows how many years ago? Sniffed it out in the upstairs closet, annihilated it, and my kids are none the wiser.

The tempter didn't make his move in the previous chapter—you know, that powerful moment when Jesus was baptized, heaven split open, and the Spirit of God descended and settled on Him. Not much of a temptation to prove you're the Son of God when God's voice is literally bellowing from heaven, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy" (Matthew 3:17), right?

The devil is just as shrewd and calculated here as he was with Eve. He waits until the end of Jesus' fast—when His human body would've been most vulnerable—and goes in for the kill in this heightened moment of solitude: "If you are the Son of God" (Matthew 4:3, 6) . . . well, *prove it*.

So when *you're* alone? When your spouse is traveling yet again? Your friends just don't get it? You're staying home with a baby who can't talk back (or maybe a teenager who very much *is* talking back)? *Bingo*.

The attacks won't come in like gangbusters on your first hard day. Satan may not even utter one word in the harder weeks after that either. But when you're most vulnerable—sinking in insecurities over your marriage, caught up in the roller coaster at work, anxious over your child's future, pushing away your friends, or disconnected from a church family—don't be surprised if he slithers up behind you.



We're actually never alone. God is with us until the very end.

But you know what's kind of fun for us who live after the Resurrection? We may *feel* left out of a conversation, like outsiders even within our own family, or like no one gets us. Our co-workers may not understand our beliefs, our friends probably make different choices, and even

the people we thought were on the same page prove by a Facebook post or their actions that they just aren't. Still the truth remains: We're actually never alone. God is with us until the very end.

Yet the enemy will always hope we'll bow to the way we feel instead of standing on the truth we know.<sup>6</sup>

Or even better, what if he could keep us from knowing the truth altogether?

While the Bible has never been more accessible at any other point in history than it is now, what did a recent study find? "Americans Love the Bible but Don't Read It Much, Poll Shows." While 88 percent of Americans own a Bible and 80 percent even think the Bible is sacred, 61 percent wish they read more of it, and only 26 percent of Americans

actually read it on a regular basis. (“Regular” meaning four or more times a week.) For the majority—57 percent to be exact? Those Bibles are touched *four times a year or less*.<sup>7</sup>

Doesn't it make so much sense now? No wonder anxiety is through the roof and spreading across our nation faster than any virus ever could! Too many of us are playing right into the devil's hand—being swayed by our emotions—because *we don't even know the truth to be able to stand on it*.

Does fear nag at you more than four times a year? Yeah, me too. *Like, daily*. Here's my Monday morning: *What's this bump on my neck? Will my child grow out of that habit? Did they pick it up at school? I WANT NAMES—WHO ARE THOSE SINNERS? Are all these Happy Meals from McDonald's slowly killing us? Will they remember me as a bad mom? Or will I die before they can even remember me? Oof, that's kind of morbid. Speaking of, are we living in the end times? WAIT, WHICH KID JUST COUGHED? TAKE A DRINK OF YOUR WATER—I CANNOT STAY HOME ANOTHER DAY. \*breathe in, breathe out\**

Well, if we pick up the sword of the Spirit and see for ourselves what God's Word has to say every (gulp) single day, then when we feel alone? Forgotten? Deserted, friendless, and left to do it on our own?

We would see with absolute clarity that God Himself promised never to leave us or forsake us—not just once, but repeatedly throughout the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 31:6 and Joshua 1:5, for starters). Then flip over to the New Testament, and we hear Jesus give us His literal Word, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NIV). Since the clock's still ticking, then surely, certainly, without a shadow of a doubt, Jesus is still with us.

Need a little more convincing? Oh, I'm glad because I haven't even mentioned the best part yet! Jesus specifically left this earth where He dwelled *with* us so the Holy Spirit could come dwell *in* us (John 16:7). Do we really understand the reality of that? I don't always. But Old Testament heroes would've given ANYTHING to have God's Spirit

living in them, comforting them, guiding them, speaking to them. I mean, I can get winded climbing up a flight of stairs, while Moses had to climb *a mountain* to meet with God (Exodus 34). And everyone else? Waited down below for the news. So the very fact that you're sealed with the Holy Spirit who raised Christ Jesus from the dead? *Mind-blowing*.

Oh, and in case you were hoping for something a little more tangible, something you could see with your own eyes, you're also connected to and forever supported by the body of Christ—the church all around the world, currently totaling 2.3 billion people<sup>8</sup>—who are in this *with you*. Plus, Hebrews 12 says we're also surrounded by a great cloud of heavenly witnesses, cheering us on as if selling out the stands in a packed stadium while we're down here running the race.

So . . . “alone”? LOL. That's just what the enemy wants you to think, but we have more than enough evidence to know nothing could be further from the truth.

Let's head back to the Garden of Eden, because the serpent's about to strike. If it's really true that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, it'd be worthwhile to get to know his tactics, wouldn't it?

Surprisingly, though, we don't see him biting Eve and waiting for the venom to do its work like we might expect. He's not coiling his body around her to constrict her breathing either or crush her bones like we've learned snakes do. (*Anyone have a contact with Ranger Rick?*)

Why does that matter? Bottom line: He's not after our physical bodies. We must know he's out to attack our minds, hearts, and souls. **So instead of killing your oxygen supply, he's out to kill your peace. Instead of destroying your health, he's more interested in destroying your confidence in God. And instead of stealing your short life on earth, he wants to steal your everlasting faith.** My grandma was right . . . snakes are just disgusting.

But again, we shouldn't be surprised. This isn't new news here. Paul cleared it up long ago in Ephesians 6—our struggle isn't against flesh and blood. So deadly viruses and wayward political movements?

Our micromanaging boss and even more micromanaging in-laws? That mounting pile of bills, your junker of a car, or those white hairs threatening to take over your whole head? Nope, not it. As rude as all of the above are—*our own mane turning against us, the horror—not the real battle.*

Our fight is never against things we can see with our own two eyes, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against the mighty powers of darkness, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Kind of intense? A little unnerving? The stuff nightmares are made of? I know, but Paul didn't let us in on this ever-raging battle to make us *scared*. He wanted to keep us aware and alert, confident in the fight and focused on the *actual* battle.

“Did God *really say*, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1, NIV, italics added).

*Boom.* Just like that, we witness the enemy's first bomb drop. Notice the ambush didn't come with a loud war cry or even a menacing voice like the Joker. He didn't roll up his sleeves, shove Eve against the garden wall, and get all cockeyed in her face either.

Rather, his strike was so subtle that it came in the form of a question. A carefully calculated, nonthreatening question from a seemingly harmless reptile who was “just curious.”

Does it sound familiar? That very question he posed then is the same one he's still (*quote-unquote*) innocuously whispering today. “Did God really say . . . ?”

Did God really say He would use all things for His glory and your good? *Doesn't look that good to me.*

Did God really say He already overcame? Did He really call you more than a conqueror through Him (raised eyebrows at Romans 8:37)? *Well then, where is He? Because (no offense) you look pretty tired and defeated.*

Did God really say peace is possible? *With a chemical or hormonal imbalance, I wouldn't hold your breath. Probably best for you to accept life as is.*

We must follow Eve's *initial* footsteps and go back to God's Word.

I mean, did God *really* say that?

And here's the first principle, the HOW to gain from this Bible hero's story. When our minds are filled with this type of question, we must follow Eve's *initial* footsteps and go back to God's Word.

"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," Eve replies. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die'" (Genesis 3:2-3).

So . . . she *knew* the truth. Eve heard God's Word loud and clear, and she was just fine with it *until* the serpent planted this seed of doubt and let the dirt do its work.

Is there anything you previously didn't pay any mind to—until the doctor listed potential risks, your friend dropped that side comment, or that family member questioned your faith? Then you camped out on it. Like Eve, you recognized what God had to say, but gave the devil a little more time on air.

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

Important: At this time, Eve only knew good. She had never tasted death, felt betrayal from a friend, or read Facebook comments from you-know-who. By the goodness of God, He shielded His image-bearers from such evil so they could live freely, without the weight of anything wicked bogging them down and stealing their peace.

But here's a key part of the enemy's sinister strategy: He showed Eve what she was lacking, presenting it as if the knowledge of evil was *a coveted thing*.

Are you getting this? FOMO isn't new to the twenty-first century. The serpent capitalized on whatever Eve lacked and twisted it as if God was withholding something good from her. The enemy is doing the same today.

Do any of these thoughts sound familiar?

- *If I'm forever single, I'll miss out on marriage. Is God keeping something good from me?*
- *If I always battle infertility, I'll miss out on having a family. Why is God withholding a blessing from me?*
- *If I die from this disease, I'll miss out on being a part of my children's lives. How can God's plans still be good?*
- *If I took this risk but failed, I'll miss out on being successful. Why doesn't God want me to have that?*
- *Ultimately, if this bad thing happens, I'll miss out on the good parts of life. Why would He keep those from me?*

Entertain these thoughts, and it won't be long until we fall back into the original trap that led to the original sin.

But it's our choice. We can think we know it all, or we can recognize that while we only see *some* things, God sees *all* things. We can question His goodness, or we can trust that He's actually not holding out on us at all, but like with this whole evil thing, protecting us from something we know absolutely *nothing about*.

When Eve gets to this crossroads, she's "convinced" what the enemy said was true (Genesis 3:6). She's like us—once we set our minds to something, there's *no going back*. Like when "we"—er, Ty—rearranged our house 15 times the month before Dottie came home. IT HAD TO BE DONE.

In this moment, to Eve, the enemy *was* making a bit of sense. God seemed to be holding back goodness, wisdom, and life, and after all, it was just *one* apple and *one* bite.

Crunch.

Now with a mouthful, Eve makes her choice and gets exactly what she wanted. Her eyes now feast not just on the knowledge of good—but of evil, too.



Wait, what do we see her doing with her supposed newfound freedom? Celebrating with confetti? Planting a big smackeroo on Adam? Going out to explore and take in all this new insight, wisdom, and intelligence she now has?

Nope. After convincing Adam to make the same choice, these two instantly feel shame over their naked bodies, pick up needlework, throw together some makeshift leaf clothes, and hide. (*Pretty impressed they did all that without Pinterest TBH.*)

It doesn't sound like that coveted knowledge of evil lived up to the hype, does it?

God calls out to them, "Where are you?" To be clear, He isn't thrown off by their new camo gear, as if they're now invisible to God Himself. No, God knew exactly where they were because as hard as this is for us to sometimes comprehend, it's impossible to hide from a God who sees all things. Notice, though, that God called them out of hiding by asking a pointed question Himself. Not just where are you *physically*, but *where's your headspace at?*

You may feel lost in your own thoughts. Overwhelmed by what just rocked your world. And you're now hiding behind a facade in hopes of masking your mistake, pain, or anxiety.

While the enemy's questions are intended to drive you further away from God, His questions always draw you *nearer*. God's still calling out, "Where are you?"—not to point out our nakedness, but to restore what's been broken. So where *are* you? Where *is* your head at these days? Is your mind caught up in the never-ending cycle of worst-case scenarios? Are you sinking in your grief, shame, or insecurities? Entertaining lies and avoiding God?

As we look around the Garden, I hope you notice the enemy is nowhere to be found after that first bite. How *convenient* of him, right? But what do we expect? He entices with promises he has no intention of keeping, and once we grab the Honeycrisp, he skedaddles—because the damage is done and his work is finished.

But that's not all I hope you see. Beyond just a coward fleeing the crime scene, notice who is coming straight for Eve . . . and who's coming for us, too.

Our biggest flex is that we don't serve a distant God who gets further away the more we trip up (even though He would be right to do so). We don't serve a merciless God who leaves us in our sin (even though He would be just to do so). And we don't serve a hard, unforgiving God who puts it on us to earn our way back into His good graces and clean up our own mess (even though He would be fair to do so).

In direct contrast, we serve a personal, loving, forgiving God who comes for us in our sin, draws us to Himself, and willingly gets involved, with a plan to save *already set in motion*. He is faithful to us even when we are obviously or obliviously unfaithful to Him.

But wait, how can that be? How can we say God's so forgiving if the very next thing we see is Adam and Eve getting the boot out of the Garden? To pound the final nail in the coffin, God goes so far as to station mighty angels and a flaming sword to guard the entrance back in. *No need to say more. I know when I'm not wanted!*

Are you picturing it like that too? Suitcases thrown out the hedge window, their collection of fig-leaf undergarments spilling out, and a loud voice bellowing, "It's over! And don't even *think* about coming back!" With a quick turn on His heels, God shakes His head and hands as if glad to finally be rid of us, sending His rebel kids on their way with nothing more than a "good riddance!" (*Too much Dr. Phil? Yeah, I kind of overdid it in middle school.*)

Before we pull an Eve and jump to the wrong conclusion, camping out on a lie as if it's truth, let's rewind a tad and hear what God actually said right before this: "Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!" (Genesis 3:22).

Do you hear the *concern in His voice*? God wanted them to live forever, yes—but not stuck in sin, eternally tainted by evil, relegated to

a broken relationship with Himself. Our God is so good that He sent them out so He could later bring them (and us) *back in*—forgiven, restored, and healed through Jesus.

Speaking of, did you know the Hebrew derivative of “sent out” in Genesis 3:23 is closely related to the New Testament Greek derivative from John 3:16? “For God so loved the world that he *gave* [or “sent in”] his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (NIV, italics added).<sup>9</sup>

*Just as He sent out Adam and Eve with a purpose, He sent in Jesus with a purpose.*

Both totally redemptive contexts. Yet at the time, would Eve have considered “banished from the Garden of Eden” her preferred choice of rescue? Did she power walk right out of that perfection, giddy over God’s plan, gung ho over her new assignment? . . . I doubt it.

As you’re going to places *you* don’t want to go—the oncologist, your job, or into the unknown like Elsa (*Sorry, I have girls, and I think even Alexa’s sick of repeating Frozen*)—you have a choice. Lemme repeat: We have a choice. We can water the enemy’s seeds of doubt and become convinced God’s holding out on us and has abandoned us. OR we can give God the benefit of the doubt—knowing that while we can only see some things, He sees all things—and since He only ever has pure, good, redemptive intentions, we can trust His ultimate plan to redeem and restore *all things* which includes where we are today.

If you choose the latter, lace up those walking shoes, grab your Fitbit, and flip on ahead, because God is sending us out with a purpose, withholding no good thing from those who do what is right (Psalm 84:11)—and we’re bound to get our steps in.

P.S. Redemption is *coming*.

## FEAR:

# “Did God really say . . . ?”

**THE HOW:** Whenever this question rises up, go back to God’s Word and confirm exactly what He said in black-and-white (sometimes red, too).

**DID GOD REALLY SAY I CAN HAVE PEACE?** Yes, Jesus said, “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27).

**DID GOD REALLY SAY HE WON’T WITHHOLD ANY GOOD THING FROM ME, EVEN THOUGH I DON’T HAVE WHAT I DESIRE MOST?** Yes, He did say that (Psalm 84:11), and we must not fall prey to a shortsighted lie. God knows what we need, He is always good, and our story isn’t even done yet. We can wait patiently and expectantly.

**DID GOD REALLY SAY I CAN’T MESS UP IF I WANT TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?** No, that’s a lie twisting the truth. Jesus came specifically because we *do* mess up, sin, and repeatedly fall short. He died on the cross to bear our punishment precisely to restore a right relationship with us. Our relationship with God is not based on what we do, but fully on what Christ has done for us. “For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14). We are adopted into His family because, if we believe in Him, “he gave [us] the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Nothing can separate us from His love. *\*fist bump\**