

## Highlights from *You Are Never Alone: Trust in the Miracle of God's Presence and Power* by Max Lucado

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### On Feeling Alone...

Are you acquainted with the downward spiral? Convinced that no one cares, that no one can help you, hear you, or heed your call? If you know the feeling, you aren't alone. I don't mean you aren't alone in knowing the feeling. I mean you aren't alone. Period. That raw, dark sense of isolation and powerlessness? It's not here to stay. If you think it's up to you and you ain't much, I have some events for you to consider.

Better said, John the apostle has some stories for you to ponder. He interwove a tapestry of miracles that were "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

Life-giving belief! This is what John wants to discuss. Abundant, robust, and resilient faith. Life happens when we believe. We find strength beyond our strength. We accomplish tasks beyond our capacity. We see solutions beyond our wisdom.

Belief is not some respectful salute to a divine being. Belief happens when we place our confidence in God. It is a decision to lean entirely upon the strength of a living and loving Savior.

To the extent we do, we will have "life in His name." This is the purpose of the miracles. John recounted signs, each one intended to stir conviction in this promise: you and I are never, ever alone.

Each and every one of Jesus' miracles was an act of kindness. Someone benefited. All these events stand together as one voice, calling on you to lift your eyes and open your heart to the possibility—indeed, the reality—that the greatest force in the universe is One who means you well and brings you hope.

John recorded them, not to impress us, but to urge us to believe not only in the divinity of Christ but also in the tender presence of Christ. This montage of miracles proclaims: God's got this! Think it's up to you and you ain't much? Hogwash. God can carry you.

### On Long-term Discouragement...

Life feels stuck when life makes no progress. When you battle the same discouragement you faced a decade ago or struggle with the same fears you faced a year ago. When you wake up to the same hang-ups and habits. When Bethesda becomes a permanent mailing address. When you feel as though everyone gets to the pool before you and nobody wants to help you.

If that is you, then pay attention to the promise of this miracle. Jesus sees you. This Bethesda of your life? Others avoid you because of it. Jesus walks toward you in the midst of it. He has a new version of you waiting to happen. He says to you what he said to the man: "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!" (v. 8 NLT).

*Stand up.* Do something. Take action. Write a letter. Apply for the job. Reach out to a counselor. Get help. Get radical. Stand up.



*Pick up your mat.* Make a clean break with the past. Clean out your liquor cabinet. Throw out the junky novels. Quit hanging with the bad crowd. Drop the boyfriend like a bad habit. Put porn filters on your phone and computer. Talk to a debt counselor.

And *walk*. Lace up your boots and hit the trail. Assume that something good is going to happen. Set your sights on a new destination and begin the hike. Getting unstuck means getting excited about getting out.

Heed the invitation of this miracle: believe in the Jesus who believes in you. He believes that you can rise up, take up, and move on. You are stronger than you think.

What will God do for you? I cannot say. Those who claim they can predict the miracle are less than honest. God's help, while ever present, is ever specific. It is not ours to say what God will do. Our job is to believe he will do something. It simply falls to us to stand up, take up, and walk.

Ask the Lord this question: What can I do today that will take me in the direction of a better tomorrow? Keep asking until you hear an answer. And once you hear it, do it. Stand up, take up, and walk.

### **On Turning Troubles into Opportunities...**

What we cannot do, Christ does! The problems we face are opportunities for Christ to prove this point. If you see your troubles as nothing more than isolated hassles and hurts, you'll grow bitter and angry. But if you see your troubles as opportunities to trust God and his ability to multiply what you give him, then even the smallest incidents take on significance. Do you face fifteen thousand problems? Before you count your money, bread, or fish, and before you count yourself out, turn and look at the One standing next to you! Count first on Christ. He can help you do the impossible. You simply need to give him what you have and watch him work.

What's in your basket? All you have is a wimpy prayer? Give it. All you have is a meager skill? Use it. All you have is an apology? Offer it. All you have is strength for one step? Take it. It's not for you and me to tell Jesus our gift is too small. God can take a small thing and do a big thing. God used the whimper of baby Moses to move the heart of Pharaoh's daughter. He used the faulty memory of an ex-con to deliver Joseph from the prison and send him to the palace. He used David's sling and stone to overthrow the mighty Goliath. He used three nails and a crude cross to redeem humanity. If God can turn a basket into a buffet with food to spare, don't you think he can do something with your five loaves and two fishes of faith?

The next time you feel overwhelmed remind yourself of the One who is standing next to you. You aren't alone. You aren't without help. What bewilders you does not bewilder him. Your uphill is downhill for him. He is not stumped by your problem. When you present your needs to him, he never, ever turns to the angels and says, "Well, it finally happened. I've been handed a code I cannot crack. The demand is too great, even for me."

You may feel outnumbered, but he does not. Give him what you have, offer thanks, and watch him go to work. Your list of blessings will be so long you'll need to buy a new hard drive for your computer so you can store it.

### **On Calming the Storms...**

Before Jesus stills the storms, he comes to us in the midst of our storms.

He says to us what he said to the disciples: "It is I; don't be afraid" (v. 20 NIV).

The literal translation of what Jesus said is "I AM; don't be afraid." I AM is God's name. If God had a calling card, it would contain this imprint: I AM. Ever since Moses saw the burning bush that refused to burn up, God has called himself "I AM" (Ex. 3:14). This is the title of steadiness and power. When we wonder if God is coming, he answers with his name: "I AM!" When we wonder if he is able, he declares, "I AM." When we see nothing but darkness, feel

nothing but doubt, and wonder if God is near or aware, the welcome answer from Jesus is this: "I AM!"

Pause for a moment and let him tell you his name. Your greatest need is his presence. Yes, you want this storm to pass. Yes, you want the winds to still. But yes, yes, yes, you want to know, need to know, and must know that the great I AM is near. Follow the example of the disciples. Welcome Jesus into the midst of this turbulent time. Don't let the storm turn you inward. Let it turn you upward.

Don't try to weather this storm alone. Row the boat and bail the water, but above all bid Christ to enter your sinking craft. Believe that you are never alone, that our miracle-working God sees you, cares about you, and will come to your aid. For all you know he may perform an immediate deliverance. You may reach your destination before you have a chance to wipe the rain off your face.

He is still the great I AM. When we find ourselves in the midst of Galilean waters with no shore in sight, he will come to us.

The next time you pray, *Is anyone coming to help me?* listen for the response of Jesus: *I AM with you in the storm.*

### **On Restoring Sight...**

What Jesus did physically for the blind beggar, he desires to do spiritually for all people: restore our sight. From heaven's viewpoint our earth is populated by sightless people. Blinded by ambition. Blinded by pride. Blinded by success. "Though seeing, they do not see" (Matt. 13:13 NIV). They do not see the meaning of life or the love of God. How else do we explain the confusion and chaos in the world? How else do we explain the constant threat of world war, plagues of hunger, and the holocaust of the unborn? How else do we explain the rising rate of suicide and opioid addiction? We have faster planes, smarter phones, and artificial intelligence, yet we are killing each other with guns and ourselves with drugs.

Billions of people simply cannot see. "The devil who rules this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. They cannot see the light of the Good News—the Good News about the glory of Christ, who is exactly like God" (2 Cor. 4:4 NCV). We need a spiritual ophthalmologist. We need Jesus to do for us what he did for the man on the side of the Jerusalem road.

You and I aren't invisible. We aren't overlooked. We aren't dismissed. We may feel like a nameless beggar in the swarms of society, but this story—and dozens of others like it—assure us that Jesus spots us on the side of the road. He takes the initiative. He makes the first move.

Apart from Christ we are blind. We cannot see our purpose. We cannot see the future. We cannot see our way out of problems and pain. We cannot see Jesus. But he sees us, from head to foot. He knows everything about us. It is not his will that we grope blindly through life. He wants us to know why we are on earth and where we are going. Our vision matters to Jesus. He will do whatever it takes to help us see how to see.

### **On the Crucifixion...**

Does the crucifixion qualify as a miracle? By all means. It embodies every feature of the other miracles in John's gospel. In the miracle of the atonement, water didn't become wine, but sinners became saints. On Calvary Jesus didn't heal a servant with a proclamation; he healed all generations with an affirmation. On Good Friday Jesus didn't tell a lame man to walk; he invited us all to dance.

With a single proclamation Jesus fed more than a crowd, stilled more than a storm, and gave sight to more than one man. His command at the Bethany cemetery was enough to call Lazarus from the grave. His announcement on Calvary was sufficient to save all who believe in him from eternal death.

Receive this, the great miracle of mercy. Let the grace of God flow over you like a cleansing cascade, flushing out all dregs of guilt and shame. Nothing separates you from God. Your conscience may accuse you, but God accepts you. Others may dredge up your past, but God doesn't. As far as he is concerned, the work is once-and-for-all-time finished.

### **On the Resurrection...**

The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian gospel. Paul, the apostle, was blunt: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless and powerless" (1 Cor. 15:17 AMP). If he has been raised, we could counter, then our faith is precious and powerful.

Accept the Easter invitation. Enter the tomb. Examine the facts. Even more, consider the implications. Because of the resurrection, a clearheaded, reasoned-out faith is a possibility.

Jesus welcomes an honest examination of the resurrection claim. He knows it all sounds far-fetched. Faith is not our native language. Hesitant? Welcome. Cautious? Welcome. A lobotomy is not a prerequisite for Christianity. Jesus invites the Society of the Seekers to view his resurrected body.

Faith is not the absence of doubt. Faith is simply a willingness to keep asking the hard questions. As my mentor Lynn Anderson says, "Faith is the decision to follow the best light you have about God and not quit."

The stone is still rolled back. The head cloth is still folded. The wrapping is still vacant. Examine the evidence. Look and see if you don't, like John, believe.

### **On Failures in Life...**

The Bible is full of famous failures. We name our children after them. We sing songs about them. We set out to imitate them. But let's be honest. There isn't a human in the Bible who didn't behave like one. They wore the pig slop of the prodigal, each and every one of them. And so do we.

We'd be wise to admit it, to come clean and come out of hiding. We, too, have fallen flat, fallen hard, and fallen enough to leave us wondering how in God's name God names us as his own. I'm not talking about minor slipups, misdemeanors, and innocent mistakes. I'm calling to the surface the Jonah moments in which we turned from God, Elijah moments in which we ran from God, Jacob moments in which we dared to make a demand of God.

Have your fumbles and stumbles left you questioning your place in God's plan? If so, let this story remind you that Christ is not finished with you either. You might be down, but you are not out. You might feel alone, but you are not alone. Jesus went on a search and rescue mission for Peter. He will do the same for you. Jesus "can keep you on your feet" (Jude v. 24 MSG). ... He was asked questions by Christ, so he answered. He obeyed. He responded. He interacted. In other words, he stayed in communion with Christ.

You'll want to do anything but that. Failure sires denial. And denial wants to avoid the very One we need. Don't give in to the desire. Head in the direction of Jesus. Speak to Jesus, and listen as he speaks to you. Obey him.

No one makes it through life failure-free. No one. Peter didn't. Jacob didn't. King David didn't. Solomon didn't. I haven't, and you won't. There is within each of us the capacity to do the very thing we resolve to avoid. At some point the stallions within break down the corral, and we—for a moment, a day, or a decade—run wild.

If this has happened to you, remember the seaside breakfast.

*When* this happens to you, remember the seaside breakfast.

Jesus still gives what he gave Peter: complete and total restoration.

## On Miracles...

Explain them away if you wish. Chalk them up to random events. Or allow them to achieve their intended purpose: to remind us that we are under the care of God's ever-present help. We are not weather vanes whipped about by the winds of fate and chance. We are the children of a mighty and good God who cares for us.

John's hope was that we would believe, that unbelievers would begin believing and believers would keep believing that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31).

There it is. The hope of John, the hope of his book, indeed the hope of God, and the hope of *this* book. That we would believe, not in our power, not in humanity's ability to help itself, not in tarot cards or good fortune, not in good looks or good luck. But that we would believe in Jesus. Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. Jesus as the Son of God.

The message of the miracles is the Miracle Worker himself. He wants you to know you are never alone. You are never without help, hope, or strength. You are stronger than you think because God is nearer than you might imagine.

May God bless your life with more miracles than you can count. May your water become cabernet. May your dark storms turn into springtime sun. May he feed thousands upon thousands through your picnic basket of faith. May you walk like the just-healed cripple, see like the was-blind man, live like the was-dead Lazarus. May you dwell in the grace of the cross, the hope of the empty tomb, and the assurance of restoration power. But most of all may you believe—believe that God is your ever-present help. And in his presence may you find rest.

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