

STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO

— YOU ARE —

Never Alone



Trust in the Miracle of
GOD'S PRESENCE and POWER

— YOU ARE —
*Never
Alone*

Trust in the Miracle of
GOD'S PRESENCE *and* **POWER**

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

You Are Never Alone Study Guide
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A Word from Max Lucado

Mother Teresa once said, “The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.” Perhaps you are acquainted with this kind of poverty in your life. You are familiar with the downward spiral. You have convinced yourself no one cares, no one can help you, no one can hear you, and no one can heed your call. You feel inside that you are on your own.

Well, if you know this feeling, I want to tell you that you aren’t alone. I don’t mean you aren’t alone in *knowing* the feeling. I mean that you *literally* aren’t alone. That raw, dark sense of isolation and powerlessness? It isn’t here to stay.

If you’re not convinced, I have some stories for you to consider. Actually, the disciple John has some stories for you to consider. He interwove a tapestry of miracles in his Gospel so you can know that you are never truly on your own when Jesus is in your life. In John’s own words, he wrote about these miracles so “you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Life-giving belief! This is what John wants you to experience. Abundant, robust, and resilient faith. John wants you to understand that life happens when you *believe*. You find strength beyond your strength. You accomplish tasks beyond your capacity. You discover solutions beyond your wisdom. Belief happens when you place your confidence in God.

As you do, you have “life in his name.” This is the purpose of the miracles that John records! He recounts these signs to stir conviction in this promise: *you are never, ever, alone*. Was this not one of the final promises of Christ? Before he ascended to heaven, he assured his friends, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20 *ESV*).

Those words meant everything to John. At the time he wrote his Gospel, he was an aged apostle serving a church in the city of Ephesus. Hair silver. Skin wrinkled. He is the last of the original disciples of Christ. Peter, Andrew, James, and the rest are all gone. Only John remains—and he knows his days are coming to an end. So he takes up one final task.

Mark’s Gospel is in circulation. Matthew and Luke have compiled their accounts. But John’s Gospel will be different. He will tell stories the others didn’t tell and add details to the ones they did relate. He will structure his Gospel around a cross-section of “signs.”

First, John takes us to Cana to sample some wine. Then he takes us to Capernaum to watch a father embrace a son he feared would die. We feel the fury of an angry storm in Galilee and hear the murmur of a hungry crowd on a hillside. We watch a paralytic stand up and a blind man look up. Before John is done, he leads us through two cemeteries, near one cross, and invites us to eavesdrop on a breakfast chat that forever changed the life of an apostle.

John's intention in relating these miracles is not to serve as entries in a history book but as samples from God's play-book. He recorded them not to impress you but to urge you to believe in the tender presence and mighty power of Christ. This montage of miracles proclaims: *God's got this!* Think it's all up to you? Hogwash. God will carry you. You're stronger than you think because God is nearer than you know.

Had Jesus just wanted to make a case for his divinity, he could have materialized a flock of birds out of thin air, caused trees to uproot, turned creeks into waterfalls, or transformed rocks into bumblebees. Such deeds would have demonstrated his power. But he wanted you to see *more*. He wanted to show you a miracle-working God who loves you, cares for you, and comes to your aid. And don't you need to know this message today?

When life seems depleted . . . does God care?

When I'm facing an onslaught of challenges . . . will God help?

When life grows dark and stormy . . . will God be there?

The answer in the life-giving miracles in the Gospel of John is a resounding *yes*.

Do you know these miracles? Do you believe in a Jesus who not only has power but also a passionate love for the weak and wounded of the world? Do you think he cares enough about you to find you in the lonely waiting rooms, rehab centers, and convalescent homes of life? Do you desire to know the God who will meet you in the midst of life's messes?

If so, take a good look at the words of John and the miracles of Christ and see if they don't achieve their desired goal: "That you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

How to Use This Guide

The *You Are Never Alone Video Study* is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a brief opening reflection and icebreaker questions to get you and your group thinking about the topic. You will then watch a video with Max Lucado and jump into some directed small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of prayer.

Each person in the group should have his or her own study guide, which includes video teaching notes, Bible study and group discussion questions, and between-sessions personal studies to help you reflect and apply the material to your life during the week. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *You Are Never Alone* book, as reading it alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. See the “recommended reading” section at the end of each session for the chapters in the book that correspond to the material you and your group are discussing.

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of Max's message, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only "go through the motions," or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, remember that the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a "safe place." This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to "fix" a problem someone might be having or to correct his or her theology, as that's not the purpose of your small-group time. Also, keep everything your group shares confidential. This will foster a rewarding sense of community in your group and create a place where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, maximize the impact of the course with the additional between-sessions studies. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days (for example, working on it a half-hour a day on several different days that week). Note that if you are unable to finish (or even start!) your

between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

Keep in mind this study is an opportunity for you to train in a new way of seeing yourself and your walk with God. The videos, discussions, and activities are simply meant to kick-start your imagination so you are not only open to what God wants you to hear but also how to apply it to your life. As you read the miracles related in John's Gospel, be listening to what God has to say to you through his Word and be reassured in his promise that *you are never alone*.

— SESSION ONE —

God Is with You in the Ordinary

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

JOHN 2:1-5

WELCOME

What was the last request you made to God? Was it for something big? Something small? Have you ever caught yourself apologizing to God for your requests?

“I know you might not care about this . . .”

“I know this doesn’t really matter in the grand scheme of things . . .”

“I know this seems like such a silly request . . .”

Why do we do this? Why are we so hesitant to pray for the “small things” in life? Perhaps it has to do with how we view God. We see him as holy and distant. Someone far off and far above everything happening on earth. We don’t view him as near and present, involved in our everyday lives, or moving through the world in an intimate way.

John opens his Gospel with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). John tells us the *Word* is Jesus, “the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” and that he “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (verse 14). Jesus was God-in-the-flesh. Once Jesus ascended into heaven, he left us with his Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 5:5)—a guide who, like the air around you, is everywhere, and like the breath in your lungs, is inside you.

So, if God is as near as your own breath, surely he is aware of what is happening in your life, in your mind, in your heart, and in your body. Furthermore, he is *concerned* about the details of your life—in your mind, heart, and body. He is with you in the highest of highs and deepest of lows. He is with you just as much during a trip to the supermarket as he is when you’re heading to the hospital for a checkup. He is in the ordinary moments of life.

In this opening session, we will look at Jesus’ first miracle recorded in John. It happened as a result of an ordinary problem in an ordinary setting and involved ordinary materials. Jesus didn’t heal anyone, or miraculously feed thousands, or even offer any parables or other teaching. Yet John recorded the story just as he did all the others—which means this story can tell us something important about who Jesus was and what that means for our lives today.

So today, find comfort in this Jesus who was divine yet altogether ordinary. This man who woke up each day, worked, fished, drank water and, occasionally, turned it into wine.

SHARE

If you or any of your group members don't know each other, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions.

- Do you ever wonder if your prayer requests are too small for God? If so, why do you think that is the case?

— *or* —

- What is your prayer style? Do you pray to God spontaneously, read prayers written by others, or some other method? Who taught you to pray this way?

READ

Invite someone to read the following verses aloud. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Luke 12:6-7).

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (Philippians 4:6).

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you (1 Peter 5:7 NLT).

What is one key insight that stands out to you from these passages?

According to these verses, what does God care about when it comes to your life?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

John wrote down the miracles that he presents in his Gospel not to impress us but to urge us to believe in the presence of Christ.

When we believe in Jesus, we have *life* . . . abundant, robust, and resilient life. We find strength beyond our strength. We accomplish tasks beyond our capacity. We see solutions beyond our wisdom. And we realize we are never, ever, alone.

As far as miracles go, bone-dry wine vats at a wedding don't even tip the scale. But perhaps this is actually the point: the *ordinariness* of it all. God wants us to come to him with our requests in *everything*—not just the big things of life.

Mary didn't worry that the size of her request was too small. She simply connected the problem with the provider. The result was miraculous provision and restoration of what had been lost.

Mary's demonstration of faith caught Jesus' attention. Not only that, but it changed his agenda.

A precise prayer gives Jesus the opportunity to remove all doubt about his love. Your problem becomes his pathway. The challenge you face becomes a canvas on which he can demonstrate his finest work.

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. John writes toward the end of his Gospel, "These [stories] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). What does this tell you about John's purpose in recording Jesus' miracles? What does it mean to "have life in his name"?

2. John starts things off in his Gospel with a sign from Christ that seems . . . *ordinary*. What situation prompted this miracle? What was the “crisis” at hand?
3. What request did Mary make of Jesus? Why do you think Jesus was hesitant at first to answer her request?
4. How did Mary respond to Jesus when he said, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4)? Why do you think she responded this way? What happened as a result?
5. Have you ever prayed for something specific and did not receive it? If so, how did you respond? Why do you think God withheld what you wanted?

6. John writes, “What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (verse 11). Who believed in Jesus after this miracle? Why is this significant?

7. What caused *you* to believe in Jesus? How did that moment, event, or person convince you? Or, if you don’t believe in Christ, what *would* make you believe?

8. What is something new or interesting you learned from Jesus’ miracle of turning water to wine? How could this apply to your everyday life and your everyday faith?

RESPOND

Spend a few moments in silence contemplating Philippians 4:6, which you read at the beginning of this session: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Use the space below to write down two or three requests you want to make known to God right now.

CLOSE

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another. You can share a request you wrote above or a different one. Remember, no request is too small for God! Have one person write down requests as you are sharing. End your time together by praying briefly for each request. You can either take turns praying or one person can lead the group in prayer.

— SESSION ONE —

Between-Sessions Personal Study

Reflect on the material you've covered this week by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. (Before you begin, you may want to read chapter 2 in *You Are Never Alone*.) Each personal study consists of several reflection activities to help you implement what you learned in the group time. The time you invest will be well spent, so let God use it to draw you closer to him. At your next meeting, share any key points or insights that stood out to you as you spent this time with the Lord.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?

This study is all about the miracles of Jesus and why they matter for us today. Given this, before you go through the next few weeks of study, it's important to consider how you feel about the miracles recorded in the Bible. Honestly consider your thoughts, beliefs, and opinions as you work

through today's personal study. Answer the following questions to get you started.

1. Have you ever personally experienced a miracle or witnessed a miracle take place in someone else's life? If so, what was that experience like for you? If not, would you say you still believe in miracles? Why or why not?
2. What has informed your belief in the area of miracles—your faith, the faith of your parents, or beliefs you have heard others express? Explain your answer.
3. How do you feel about the miracles described in the Bible? Do you believe they happened or do you consider them folklore? Explain your response.
4. When Paul wrote letters to the early church, he was careful to remind his readers that Jesus was fully human but also fully God, as the following passages relate:

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to

fullness.¹⁰ He is the head over every power and authority (Colossians 2:9–10).

⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people (1 Timothy 2:5–6).

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Philippians 2:5–7).

How is Jesus described in each of these passages? What are some of the key characteristics that Paul points out about Jesus?

5. Considering your answers to the previous question, how would you describe Jesus? As God? As man? As both? Explain your answer.

6. How can an understanding of who Jesus actually was affect the way you view the miracles he performed and whether or not you believe in them?

Prayer: *Assess how you feel after today's study. Did these questions stir up anything in you, whether good or bad? Perhaps you have more questions for God than before. Perhaps you feel steadier in your faith than before. However you are feeling, and whatever questions you are asking, spend the next few minutes bringing them before God in prayer. You don't have to hide your doubt or skepticism or fears. Bring your full self before God's throne and listen for his voice.*

WATER TO WINE

In this week's group discussion, you looked at the story of Jesus' first miracle at Cana:

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

⁴ Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

⁶ Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. ⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. ¹⁰ And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!”

¹¹ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. (John 2:1–11 NJKV)

I. John states that Jesus and his disciples were invited to a wedding (see verse 2). What does this indicate about Jesus’ social life? What does it tell you about who Jesus is?

2. At one point, Mary turned to Jesus and told him there was no wine left (see verse 3). Why do you think Mary chose to make this particular statement to Jesus? What does this tell you about the way that Mary viewed Christ?

3. As you discussed this week, the closest English translation of Jesus' words in John 2:4 appear to be, "Mother, your concern and mine are not the same." It is as if Jesus carried an "appointment book" and had a specific time in mind when he planned to reveal his power to the world—and this day in Cana was not that moment. Given this information, what does it tell you about Jesus that he decided to do the miracle anyway?

4. There were six waterpots at the wedding, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. This means that Jesus turned 120 to 180 gallons of water into wine. What is significant about the fact that Jesus provided this much abundance in performing the miracle? What does this say

about the way he provides for you when you come to him with your requests?

5. How does John describe the quality of the wine (see verse 10)? What does the quality of the wine tell you about Jesus, his generosity, and his power?

6. What is something you learned about Jesus in this story? Did this story make you view Jesus in a new way? If so, how?

Prayer: *John opens his Gospel with a beautiful depiction of who Jesus was from the beginning of creation until he came to earth. Read John 1:1–4 and 14 as your prayer time today. Read the verses slowly and as many times as you want. Note that “the Word” refers to Christ himself.*

GOD IN YOUR ORDINARY

The miracle at the wedding in Cana was not a healing, a deliverance, or a resurrection. Jesus simply *turned water to wine*. An incredible feat . . . but what was the point? Compared to Jesus' other miracles, this one accomplished something quite ordinary. But as you discussed this week, this is perhaps the point: *the ordinariness of it all*. Today, spend some time studying and reflecting on how God interacts with you in your ordinary and everyday life.

1. Has God ever answered a “big request” in your life? Has he ever answered a “small request”? If so, what were your requests? How did God answer?

2. John writes, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask *anything* according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14–15, emphasis added). In the space below, list major problems that are causing you anxiety in the column

labeled “Big.” List small problems that are causing you anxiety in the column labeled “Small.”

BIG	SMALL

3. Which items on your lists have you recently brought before God in prayer? Which ones have you not prayed for yet? Why?

4. Something that sets Christianity apart from other religions is the intimacy that God has with his people. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, God is portrayed as involved, near, and present—not cold or distant. As we have seen, God was so involved with his creation that he came to dwell among us in the form of Jesus. This gives us hope that God truly cares about the ordinary parts of our lives, and we can bring anything before him. Jesus said the following in one of his teachings:

⁷ “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:7–12).

What happens when you ask, seek, and knock (see verse 7)? What types of requests does this cover? What is significant about that fact?

5. What metaphor does Jesus use to describe your Father in heaven (see verses 9–10)? How does this help you understand what God is like and how he cares for you?

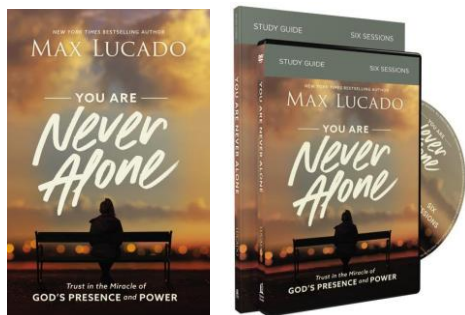
6. This passage ends with a verse that is often referred to as the Golden Rule: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (verse 12). This might seem out of place, but how do Jesus’ words in verses 7–11 support this idea?

Prayer: *Read this prayer aloud or silently to yourself: “God, make me aware of your presence today. Allow me to hear your voice while I work, spend time with friends, do chores, or take care of my family. I confess I don’t always believe you care about the regular moments of my life, but I need help even in the smallest things, such as my attitude, energy level, patience, and work. Remind me to surrender every fear and anxiety to you, no matter how small it is. Thank you for caring about me and the ordinary parts of my life. Thank you for being a good Father.” As you go about your day, involve God in your ordinary life and tasks. Ask for small things and big things. Pay attention to his presence and what he might be saying to you.*

FURTHER REFLECTION

Reflect on what you studied this week: miracles, the character of Christ, and God's involvement in your everyday life. Journal your thoughts or write them as a prayer to God, either asking him questions about what you learned, thanking him for what you learned, or seeking answers from him on what to do next now that you better understand these topics in Scripture. Also write down any observations or questions that you want to bring to your next group time.

For Next Week: In preparation for next week, read chapters 3–4 in *You Are Never Alone*.



YOU ARE *Never Alone* by MAX LUCADO

When life feels depleted, does God care? I'm facing an onslaught of challenges, will God help? When life grows dark and stormy, does God notice? I'm facing the fear of death, will God help me? The answer in the life-giving miracles in the Gospel of John is a resounding yes.

Max Lucado looks at the miracles of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John. John chose the stories and events from Jesus' life that he believed would give his readers strength, empower them, lift them up, and speak life into their situations.

John's record of Jesus' miracles reassures us that we are never stuck or without hope. We are never forgotten. All the forces of heaven have been marshalled to come to our aid. A rescue mission is underway! The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A multitude of angels and the power of Scripture. The strength of prayer and the wisdom of saints. All this, and more, are continually working together to get us out and see us through. This is the message of the miracles . . . that with God you are never alone.

LEARN MORE