

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO

— YOU ARE —

*Never
Alone*



Trust in the Miracle of
GOD'S PRESENCE and POWER

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Trust in the Miracle of
GOD'S PRESENCE and POWER

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	XI
1. We Can't, but God Can	1
2. He Will Replenish What Life Has Taken	11
3. The Long Walk Between Offered and Answered Prayer	23
4. Stand Up, Take Up, and Walk	35
5. We Can Solve This	47
6. I AM in the Storm with You	57
7. He Gives Sight to the Blind	67
8. The Voice That Empties Graves	79
9. Paid in Full	93
10. He Saw and Believed	103
11. Breakfast with Jesus	115
12. Believe, Just Believe	129
<i>Questions for Reflection</i>	141
<i>Notes</i>	215

CHAPTER 1

We Can't, but God Can

It's just me, and I ain't much."

We'd been talking for well into an hour before she said the words. We'd worked our way through two cups of machine-brewed, hospital-waiting-room coffee. Hers with sweetener, mine with powdered creamer. Small of stature she was. No makeup, hair matted. Her T-shirt was loose fitting and crumpled. I wondered if she'd slept in it. She stirred incessantly, wheeling the plastic stick round and round until her drink became a small whirlpool akin to the emotions she was feeling—ever-spinning, circling, cycling feelings of helplessness.

Her seventeen-year-old son, who at that moment was in the intensive care unit two doors and fifty yards away, had battled opioid addiction for a year, maybe more. A car wreck had landed him in the hospital. Four days of forced detox had left him craving pills that the doctors would not provide. He was secured to the bed with restraints.

It took the mom nearly an hour to tell me what I just told you in one paragraph. Her story required sob breaks and deep sighs and included flashes of anger when referring to her ex-husband,

YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

whose presence and child support had been missing for the better part of a year. No sign of the father all week. He always had his excuses. All in all the mom believed, “It’s just me, and I ain’t much.”

She squeezed her foam cup so tightly I thought it would crack.

Do you know this feeling? 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. 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” (Matt. 28:20 ESV).

Those words must have meant everything to John.

Picture the aged apostle as he shares these stories. He’s an old man. Hair silver, skin wrinkled. But his eyes are full of hope, and he has a laugh that can fill a room. He pastors a collection of Christ followers in Ephesus. He loves to tell—and they love to hear—about the day some six decades earlier and a thousand miles removed when Jesus invited him to lay down the fishing net and follow him. John did.

So did Peter, Andrew, and James. They are gone now. They’ve long since fulfilled their missions and finished their lives. Only John remains.

And John, likely knowing his days are coming to an end, takes on one final task. Mark’s gospel is in circulation. Matthew and Luke have compiled their accounts of the life of Christ. John wants to do the same. Yet his gospel will be different. He seeks to tell stories they didn’t and to add details to stories they told. He selects for his gospel a cross section of “signs.”

He takes us to Cana to sample some wine, then to Capernaum to watch a father embrace the 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’ll lead us through two cemeteries and near one cross and invite us to eavesdrop on a breakfast chat that changed the life of an apostle. John’s chosen miracles run the gamut from a wedding oversight to a violent execution, from empty bellies to empty dreams, from abandoned

YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

hopes to buried friends. And we will be careful, oh so careful, to see the signs as John designed them to be seen, not as entries in a history book, but as samples from God's playbook.

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 in the tender presence and mighty power 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.

You're stronger than you think because God is nearer than you know.

Jesus touched wounds. He spoke words of hope. Lives were improved. Blessings were bestowed. There was a message in his miracles: "I am here. I care."

Had Jesus wanted just to make a case for his divinity, he could have materialized a flock of birds out of thin air and caused trees to uproot and float away. He could have turned creeks into waterfalls or rocks into bumblebees. Such deeds would have demonstrated his power. But Jesus wanted us to see more. He wanted to show us that there is a miracle-working God who loves, cares, and comes to our aid.

Do we not need this message today?

This book is a child of the quarantine. I completed it during the days of coronavirus. When I began writing it, some months ago, Covid-19 was unknown to most. Phrases like "social distancing" and "shelter in place" may have been found in manuals, but not in our street vocabulary. But that's all changed. As of this

writing, millions of people are hunkered and bunkered in apartments, houses, huts, and cabins.

This crisis exacerbated an already rampant epidemic of isolation and depression. One study found that loneliness is as dangerous to one's health as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. It can lead to dementia or Alzheimer's, heart disease, a weakened immune system, and a shorter life span.¹

Administrators of one of the largest hospitals in America cite loneliness as a major reason for overcrowded emergency rooms. Parkland Hospital of Dallas, Texas, made this startling discovery as they were looking for ways to unclog the system. They analyzed data and compiled a list of high utilizers. They identified eighty patients who went to four emergency rooms 5,139 times in a twelve-month period, costing the system more than \$14 million.

Once they identified the names of these repeat visitors, they commissioned teams to meet with them and determine the reason. Their conclusion? Loneliness. Poverty and food shortage were contributing factors, but the number one determinant was a sense of isolation. The ER provided attention, kindness, and care. Hence, the multiple return visits. They wanted to know that someone cares.²

Don't we all? The apostle John wanted us to know that Someone cares. He wanted us to believe, to set our weight fully upon the strength of this loving God.

When life feels depleted, does God care?

If I'm facing an onslaught of challenges, will he help?

When life grows dark and stormy, does he notice?

If I'm facing the fear of death, will he help me?

YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

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 has not only power but 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?

I recently went on a walk with two of my best companions: my three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter, Rosie, and my faithful, steadfast dog, Andy.

Andy loves to explore a dry riverbed near our house. And Rosie loves to follow right behind him. She thinks she can go wherever he goes. And when I offer to help her, she waves me away. She is a handful, this girl, kind of like her grandmother. So Andy led the way. Rosie scampered behind, and I tried to keep up.

Andy spotted a critter in a thicket of bushes and dashed into them. Rosie thought she could do the same. Andy ran straight through, but Rosie got stuck. The branches scratched her skin, and she began to cry.

“Papa Max! Will you help me?”

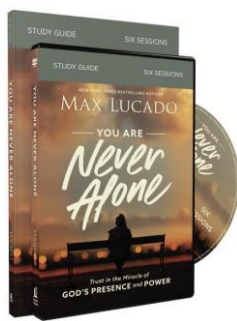
What did I do? I did what you would have done. I stepped into the thickets and extended my hands. She raised her arms and let me lift her out.

God will do the same for you. You are never alone, never without help, never without hope.

You and I long for Someone who will meet us in the midst of life’s messes. We long to believe in a living, loving, miracle-working God who won’t think twice about stepping into the thorny thickets of our world and lifting us out.

WE CAN'T, BUT GOD CAN

If this is your desire, 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 Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).



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.

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