REPLACE LIFELONG PATTERNS OF FEAR AND ANXIETY WITH PEACE AND REST

You know how anxiety and fear feels—your stomach drops, your neck tightens, your whole body tenses—but do you know what to do when anxiety fills your days and troubles your nights? You’ve probably already tried a few strategies, like denial or working harder, and noticed that they aren’t a permanent solution. If you are tired of dealing with anxiety and worry on your own, then this guide is just for you. As you go through each set of meditations, anxiety will gradually yield to hope, peace, and rest. Of course, this is a lifelong process, but going through this devotional guide, either by yourself or with a small group, will kick-start the process and bring lifelong change.

In true kingdom fashion, Welch takes things that are likely to cause us to stumble, to fear, and give up, and challenges us to see how God uses them to make us more like Jesus. He reminds us that freedom from fear and anxiety is not a one-time experience, but rather a daily ongoing process. He has written in a manner suitable for cross generations.

CHARLES DUNAHOO, D.MIN., Coordinator of the PCA Christian Education and Publications Committee; author of Foundations and Authority

Ed Welch guides us skillfully through the minefield of our fears and anxieties about money, death, and fear of man to our God who promises to never leave us or forsake us. After reading, I was convicted, encouraged, and resolved to trust God and his promise to be with me instead of giving in to my often nameless fears.

ROSE MARIE MILLER, Missionary, Bible teacher; author of From Fear to Freedom

I don’t consider myself a fearful person, but Ed gently captured my heart in the first lesson where he showed me how much I really do fear and explained what those fears were saying. But Ed didn’t leave me there; he offered hope. He showed me the way to glorify God in my fears and to replace the despair of anxiety with the joy of my salvation.

JACK DELK, Pastor for covenant member care, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN

This book is good food for the soul. Gather a few friends around your kitchen table and read and think together—an excellent resource for home groups or adult classes in the life of the church.

MARC DAVIS, M.DIV., Shepherding Pastor, New Life Presbyterian Church, Glenside, PA

EDWARD T. WELCH, M.DIV., PH.D., is a licensed psychologist and faculty member at CCEF. He has counseled for over twenty-six years and has written many articles, booklets, and books including When People Are Big and God Is Small, Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave; Blame It on the Brain?, Crossroads: A Step-by-Step Guide Away from Addiction, Depression: A Stubborn Darkness; and Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest.

New Growth Press

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EDWARD T. WELCH

WHEN I AM AFRAID

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE AWAY FROM FEAR AND ANXIETY

EDWARD T. WELCH
When I Am Afraid
When I Am Afraid

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE
AWAY FROM FEAR AND ANXIETY

Edward T. Welch
To
*Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg
and The Sovereign Grace churches*
for their kindness and generosity
Author’s Note

This workbook is a complement to Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest, but it is not a chapter-by-chapter study guide for that book. It is intended to stand alone as a study guide for individuals and groups.
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Fear is the perfect problem. No doubt, it can be paralyzing and painful. When it comes, your goal is to get rid of it immediately. By its very nature fear tells you to run rather than face whatever is causing it. The problem can be life-dominating. But it is ideal in this: God reserves his most persuasive, beautiful, and comforting words for fearful people. If you are familiar with fear, and we all are, get ready to hear something good.

You have heard the Psalm that begins, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1). It is timeless and comforting, but it sounds good only if you are familiar with fear and anxiety.

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). It is God’s most frequent and comforting promise. They are beautiful words, but you have to know about fear and anxiety for them to be God’s words to you.

“Peace to you” (Galatians 1:3). It can sound like an ordinary, if old-fashioned, greeting; but if fear and anxiety are your companions, they are wonderful words, filled with hope.

So get your pen handy and get ready to listen to God’s Word. Really listen. Because when you really listen, you can’t help but respond. When you hear beautiful and comforting words that surpass anything you could imagine, you do something. You are moved into action. You tell other people. You believe. You are changed.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

This study guide is designed to help you meditate on what God says to fearful and anxious people. It stretches over seven weeks. That way you will have more time to meditate on the Bible until fear and anxiety begin to yield ground to hope, peace, and rest. Spend twenty minutes or so each day reading and answering the questions. Replacing fear and anxiety with peace and rest is a lifelong task, but seven weeks, twenty minutes a day, can kick-start the process.

It unfolds this way. In the first two weeks you will identify fear and anxiety, listen to what it is really saying, and proceed to the story of how God provided miraculous food (manna) for his children. This story about manna will be your foundation for much that God will say to you about fear.

With basic tools in hand, in the following three weeks you will consider the three most common categories of fear: fear of not having enough money, fear of death, and fear of the opinions or violence of other people.

The last two weeks will reflect on how God makes promises of faithfulness to his people and swears that he will keep those promises. Psalm 46 will also be on the docket, with one application being that you are able to focus on today because you know that the Lord will be with you tomorrow.

When possible, go through this workbook with a friend or small group. God has determined that change typically occurs in the context of a community. There you can learn from others, put words onto your experience, glean from the Bible together, be prayed for, and pray for others. Isn't it like God to make the path of change enjoyable?

And what do you get at the end of your seven-week investment? Indomitable, warriorlike, nothing-can-intimidate-you courage—or maybe something a little more modest and better. While “nonstop freedom from fear and anxiety” might sound good at first, if that happened, difficult circumstances would never be a time to turn to your strong King. Instead, you would just trust in yourself, which is part of the problem and is the very last thing we would want.

What you are aiming for are better goals:

- You want to hone your spiritual instincts so that you turn to Jesus when you are anxious, rather than trusting in your ability to solve or deny problems.
Getting Started

• You want to know what Jesus says because when you turn to him in this way his words go deep.
• You want to be less fearful and anxious and more content and hopeful.
• You want to be more confident that God’s communication to you in the Bible speaks meaningfully to all the struggles of life.

That, my friend, is what awaits you.
Week 1

Fear and Anxiety Speak Out

In the first week, you are going to locate fear and anxiety and listen to them. Of course, because they find you, the search is easy. But the more you see them, the more you will benefit from God’s words to fearful and anxious people.

To be human is to be afraid.

We are small; the world is big. Though we make plans, follow through on decisions, and feel like we have some say-so, we can’t control even the most trivial events. Amass enough money to keep creditors at bay, then death comes knocking at your door. Lock the door to secure all your belongings, then rust and decay steal your fortune from within.

Neither is there any consolation in being poor. It’s true that the less you have the less there is to lose, and if you are poor you may be less vulnerable to thievery, but you may still worry about being out on the street and finding your next meal. Having material possessions can make you feel as though a buffer is between you and . . . whatever is out there that is so creepy.

Feeling better now? Don’t worry, the story ends well.

FIND YOUR FEARS

The first step toward overcoming your fears is to locate them—and to locate a lot of them. The attractiveness of God’s words to you depends on it. If you can’t see your fears and worries, then God’s words of comfort won’t go deep.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

So, just for the sake of this exercise, go ahead and assume that you are absolutely riddled with fears. Find one, and you will find dozens more. Fear, anxieties, and worries are pack animals. They always travel in groups.

⇒ What fears and worries can you locate immediately?

⇒ What fears do you have regarding those people you love?
Fears and worries arise when we could lose something important to us—something we love. What are you afraid you could lose?

What fears do you have about your own death and possible physical disability?
WHEN I AM AFRAID

Any specific fears? If your specific fear is not listed here, add it to the bottom row.

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Whatever fears you have, you can be sure you are not alone. Just tell a few people you are beginning a study about fear, anxiety, and worry. Ask them for their thoughts. What fears do they have? How do they deal with them? Go ahead; try it.

Your conversation will accomplish two things. First, it will confirm that you are not crazy. Your seemingly very normal neighbors can probably top your fears. Second, your conversation will turn you outward. One of the ways of wisdom is to look outside of ourselves and care about the interests of others.

LISTEN TO YOUR FEARS

Your emotions are a kind of language. Anger, embarrassment, happiness, grief, guilt—they all say something. For example, anger says, “It’s your fault.” Listen more carefully and it says, “I am authorized to stand in judgment of you.”

Fear, too, is saying something, and you would be wise to listen. It says, “Run for the hills,” and “Avoid, deny, pretend it’s not going to happen.” Anything else?
Fear and Anxiety Speak Out

What might your fears and anxieties be truly saying?

Fear and anxiety make a prediction. One of their messages is clear. Fear and anxiety both live in the future. They say, “There is a future threat to something I love.” We fancy ourselves as prophets, and we keep trusting in our predictions even though they don’t come to pass. Fear and worry are prophecies. Check out the fears you listed, and see if this fits.

What prediction is your fear making?

Fear and worry say something about our relationship with God. Now let’s go one more step. When we listen to fear and worry, we can usually notice that we
are predicting the worst, and we can often detect the connection with things or people we love. But it is more difficult to hear what our fears are saying about our relationship with God.

So listen even more carefully because fears and worries have everything to do with him.

You can see how God is connected to everything when a little child keeps asking “why” questions. Start anywhere: “Why do I have a nose?” “Why do I have to go to bed?” “Why do I have to eat peas?” “Why is the sky blue?” Before the fifth why, your answer has probably become, “Because God made it that way.” All of life is connected to God. Our fears and worries are no different.

We are God’s offspring who either run from him or run to him. Those are the only two possibilities, even when we are afraid. When we are on the fence, trusting God a little and trusting ourselves a little, we can feel like we are going neither away from him nor toward him. But a closer look at our faith reveals that in our vacillating we have already made our decision: we have decided to turn from him and put our trust in ourselves or something else.

What do you think you might be saying about God when you are anxious or afraid?

The task at hand is to practice turning to the Lord when you are afraid—so it becomes natural and instinctive to turn to him. The psalmists, of course, were experts.
The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?
When evil men advance against me
to devour my flesh,
when my enemies and my foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then will I be confident. (Psalm 27:1–3)

Sound impossible? Confidence even when the enemy is already in the house?
At this point, it is enough to know that fear is about trust, love, and prophecies of the future, and the most important task is to learn the knack of turning quickly to the Lord.

Read Psalm 56, and notice how quickly King David moves from fear to faith:

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me;
all day long they press their attack.
My slanderers pursue me all day long;
many are attacking me in their pride.
When I am afraid,
I will trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can mortal man do to me?
All day long they twist my words;
they are always plotting to harm me.
They conspire, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
eager to take my life.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

On no account let them escape;
in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.
Record my lament;
list my tears on your scroll—
are they not in your record?
Then my enemies will turn back
when I call for help.
By this I will know that God is for me.

In God, whose word I praise,
in the LORD, whose word I praise—
in God I trust; I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me?
I am under vows to you, O God;
I will present my thank offerings to you.
For you have delivered me from death
and my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before God
in the light of life. (Psalm 56, italics mine)

Does this discourage you or arouse hope? If it discourages you because the
psalmist seems like a spiritual superman, remember that he is just like you—
except you have more resources than he did. You have more of God’s Word and
more of the Spirit. He might be a few years ahead of you, but this psalm can be
your own.

“DO NOT BE AFRAID”

Would you believe that this is the most frequent command in the Bible?
More than three hundred times God commands his people to not be afraid.

There are two ways to hear these commands. One is, “Stop it right now!
Don’t be afraid!” In this case fear and worry would be just plain wrong. It would
violate God’s direct command. When afraid or anxious you would confess to the
Lord that it is sin—and then confess it again and again.

But there is another way to hear this command.
Have you ever heard a parent say to a child, “Be careful”? Technically, it is a command, yet no child would take it that way. The parent is not saying, “Be careful or you will be in trouble,” but, “I love you, and my desire is that you be safe.”

Here is what Jesus says to you: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

This is not an edict from the King. The term “little flock” gives you a window into God’s heart. This is both a plea and an encouraging word from the Father, who knows and loves you. It is exactly what you need because when you are afraid you desperately need someone bigger than yourself in whom you can trust.

Are fear and worry sinful? Are they caused by a heart that doesn’t trust God? Not necessarily. As you consider your fears and worries more closely, you might find that you are trusting in yourself rather than God, and in that case confession will be exactly what the doctor ordered.

No surprise there. Confession of sin is an everyday occurrence when you follow Jesus Christ, so you should expect such things when you are examining your fears. There is nothing discouraging in that. If you keep Jesus in view and give him the last word (“I have forgiven you, I do forgive you, and I will forgive you”), confession of sin will be hopeful and encouraging.

So sometimes you will see that your fears mean you are trusting in yourself rather than the Lord. But you will always find that fear and worry are opportunities to hear God, to either turn toward him or to keep facing him and grow in trusting him. “When I am afraid, I will trust in you” (Psalm 56:3).

Fear and worry are reminders. Better yet, they are opportunities. They are a string around your finger reminding you that you can trust the Creator God who hears, cares, and acts. They are opportunities to know God better.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It’s more than you bargained for, isn’t it? Perhaps you picked up this workbook hoping to find a strategy that would get rid of nagging worries, but what you got is God. It is the ultimate bait and switch! You get lured in by promises of more rest in your life, but what you get is the King, the kingdom, and promises that extend beyond death.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

Does that sound good? You know you are on the right path when it sounds good.

What better way to end than to pray? Given what you have considered so far, how does it lead you to pray? Go ahead and write out your prayer or have someone lead the group in prayer.

Week 1 Goals:

- To identify what your fears and anxieties predict and what they say about the Lord—deciphering that language is one of the important skills of a wise life.
- To know that because God speaks so frequently about fear and anxiety, he must care about them—no fear or anxiety seems trivial or silly to him.
- To turn more often and more quickly to the Lord when fears strike
Week 2

The God of Suspense Reveals His Plans

This week you will spend time in two Old Testament passages. They are the Bible’s cornerstone for how to handle fears and anxieties. The first will be Exodus 14. Here God actually takes his people into harm’s way. After 400 years they are leaving Egypt, and God tells them to take a route that will trap them so that the Egyptian army is in front of them and the inhospitable sea is behind them. But things, of course, are not always what they seem.

The second passage is from chapter 16, a little later in the Exodus story. It tells about how God gives manna to his people when they are in the desert. His intent is to teach them about fear and worry.

God does not conform to our timetable.

Our timetable, of course, is that right now our silos would be filled to the brim—with enough food for us and our descendants for the next five generations. We easily forget that such largesse would mean spiritual death for us because we would trust in our silos and have no reason to walk through life trusting our God.

Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the Lord?”
Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. (Proverbs 30:8–9)

But all the same, we would prefer that God deliver us with plenty of time to spare rather than at the eleventh hour.

DELIVERANCE AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

The ways of God are better and wiser than our own. Although he doesn’t choose last-minute deliverances every time, he assures us that this is one of his parenting strategies with his children. The greatest gift he could give is the gift of faith, in which we learn to trust him in good times and bad, and these deliverances can be wonderful opportunities. The person who is open to learn from them will be fearless, free, and content.

Think about it. You will trust in something or someone; that’s part of being human. You will trust in your silos, your spouse, your wealth, your loved ones, your cunning, or your health—or you will trust in the Lord. Trust in things that are untrustworthy, and you are trusting in quicksand. You are trusting in things that cannot sustain the weight of your trust. And fear, of course, will be the result. Trust in the Lord, and you are secure.

What we need is a divine tutorial, and God often uses seemingly dire circumstances for his best tutorials.

Travel back into biblical history for a moment. The people of Israel have just been liberated from Egyptian bondage. It is one of the most important moments in the Old Testament. By God’s power, and his power alone, they were leaving 400 years of slavery, and they were leaving with their sacks full of Egyptian provisions.

Then they receive a most unusual directive: God tells the people to double back toward the Egyptians so Pharaoh will think they are confused and vulnerable (Exodus 14:2). Smelling blood, Pharaoh pursues the trapped and defenseless Israelites. His army is in front of them, and the impassable sea is behind
The God of Suspense Reveals His Plans

them. No doubt the strategy must have had Moses scratching his head, Moses’ aides questioning his sanity, and the people mad—and scared.

They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The L ORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” (Exodus 14:11–14)

Stand still and watch a pivotal event in the history of Israel? That is certainly a counterintuitive directive to fearful people. Fear calls for fight and flight, not standing and watching. But in this case, as with most eleventh-hour moments, no other choice exists. They have no weapons, and there is no place to go. It is the perfect tutorial. They can only direct their saucerlike eyes to how the Lord will keep his promise to them.

Keep it, he does. The Egyptian army is destroyed, and the people walk on dry land.

That day the L ORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the L ORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the L ORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. (Exodus 14:30–31)

Nice deliverance, isn’t it? Doesn’t it make you wish that God would do such things now? But remember this: you live when God’s power is even more on display than it was then. The Spirit of God has been given, and the kingdom of heaven is advancing. Somehow, you have access to an even better deliverance.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

You can probably remember times when you thought everything was crashing down around you and there was no way out. Yet as you look back you can see that there was a way out. God guided you on a path through the trouble.

Describe a time in your life when you experienced God’s deliverance.

Are there any places in your life in which you are feeling cornered now?

Let’s say you are reading a scary story or watching a scary movie. The hero is in perilous straits. Death will pounce in the next few seconds. You want to yell out, “Stop, don’t do that!” But you know it’s too late.

Now let’s say you are reading the same book or watching the same movie, but you already know that the hero doesn’t die. Though you are in the same scene as before, this time you are calm. At most, you are curious as to how your
The God of Suspense Reveals His Plans

hero will be delivered, but you aren’t scared because you know everything will be fine.

If you had been one of the people who were trapped by the Egyptian armies, you would, no doubt, have been overrun by fear. But once delivered, if you faced a similar situation later, you might be less scared. You might simply think, *I wonder how the Lord will deliver us this time.*

That is the story of your life when you put your trust in the King. This calmness is his desire for you. You know the ending, and you are assured that it will be good, even better than you can imagine.

Here is the choice when you face desperate situations: they can either be moments that lead you in abject terror, or they can be times when the loving Father teaches you some of the most wonderful lessons of your life.

Which perspective do you choose?

Even if you choose God’s perspective, your confidence in him won’t be perfect. But over time you will find that you turn to him more quickly. Some day, you might even find yourself in an impossible situation and notice that you are looking forward to what your Father will do. You will see it as an opportunity.

THE MANNA PRINCIPLE

The parting of the sea was only a warm-up.

Do you remember the passage in which Jesus tells us not to worry (Matthew 6:25–34)? He says his Father cares even for flowers and birds, which are parts of creation that are less important to him than we are. He concludes by reminding us to keep our attention on today: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself” (Matthew 6:34).

When he says this to us, he is thinking about the time when his Father first taught that lesson.

Jesus is thinking about manna.

It was another eleventh-hour deliverance. The children of Israel are hungry, they have no crops, and they are in the desert. Their former Egyptian slavery, even with meager rations, is starting to look better than freedom with starvation. So they respond in classic human style: with grumbling and complaining.
God counters with his characteristic holy style—because of his grace he feeds them with manna.

But the manna he sends for them to eat does more than just feed them. It also teaches them. First, it teaches them to act on the grace God gives today by collecting the manna and enjoying it. Second, it teaches them to trust him for tomorrow. Every night they go to bed with empty cupboards. Every morning they wake up wondering whether the manna will be on the ground. Every morning it is.

After about forty years of this routine, they are probably getting the hang of it. They wake up, get dressed, take out their manna pots, and head out the door before they even check to see whether the manna is there. They are learning to trust God for tomorrow.

The message is clear: act on the grace God gives you today, and wait confidently for the grace God will give you tomorrow.

Anxiety and worry are always off in the future. They are scouts on the frontier. They run ahead and spy on the enemy. When they return they tell tales of bloodthirsty giants, an enemy army that extends to the horizon, insurmountable odds, and sure defeat. These spies, you see, have been commissioned to always envision the worst-case scenario.

Your task is to denounce those alarmist spies and instead adopt the story of manna because it is, indeed, your story. Last night manna wasn’t on the ground. You wake up, and there it is. It is everything you need for today.

Where in your life do you need God’s manna?
The God of Suspense Reveals His Plans

☞ How could making the manna story your own change the way you live?

☞ Can you think of times when you woke up expecting the ground to be bare and he gave you just what you needed?

Can you understand why you worry when you think about tomorrow? You worry because you don’t have what you need yet. If you imagine tomorrow’s misery without tomorrow’s manna, of course you are going to worry. Tomorrow’s manna isn’t on the ground yet. You have manna for today only. In his great wisdom, God doesn’t give you tomorrow’s manna today. Otherwise you would forget him and trust in yourself.
WHEN I AM AFRAID

Get specific with your worries and anxieties. For example, let’s say you are anxious about getting cancer. You have seen its effects on other people, and you fear the possible disfigurement, pain, and death. You can’t imagine having grace, which is the New Testament version of manna, to go through such a thing, even though you have seen God give grace to others. You predict that tomorrow’s grace will not be enough. The manna will no longer be on the ground. You worry.

But God promises grace when you need it.

What will that grace look like? The specifics are impossible to tell. But he will give you grace to trust in him, grace to love others, and grace to have hope more than fear.

Have you ever heard people say, in the midst of their hardships, that they can tell people are praying for them? What they are saying is, “When I imagined something like this, I always thought it would be impossible. I could never bear it. But now that I am in it, God is faithful. I can’t explain it, but somehow he is carrying me along.”

Now, take one of your own anxieties. Apply the manna principle to it.

Are you worried because you don’t have the grace yet to deal with something that might or might not happen in the future? Like what?
Don’t expect to be an expert immediately. The Israelites practiced this for forty years, and they were still clumsy when it came to trusting God during difficult times.

Any thoughts on how you can remember this story when you need it?

Fears and anxieties always want more information. They think that knowledge is power. In response, your heavenly Father confides in you. What you read in his Word is no mere story. It is the revelation of the very heart of your Father. He is bringing you into his innermost thoughts. He is giving you what your fears and anxieties are asking for. He is giving you information about the future.

THE MANNA PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

A doctor removed a suspicious mole on a man’s shoulder. The doctor said he got it all but couldn’t be sure until he scanned the area in another six months. Those six months were business as usual for the man. He worked, ministered to others, said little about the pending tests, and continued to pray that he would know and love the Lord. On the evening before his six-month checkup, he slept well.

The results from that checkup: his cancer had spread. The statistics indicated he had from four to twelve months to live. He had just passed the age of fifty,
his junior-high-aged children were doing well, and he thought he was moving into his most productive years.

How might you have responded if you’d received this news? (Though the question is somewhat unfair because you do not have manna for such things right now.)

This man’s actual response? After hearing the death sentence, his first words were, “Nothing has changed.”

In other words, God had rained manna yesterday and today, and he would send it tomorrow. God is good now, and he will be good tomorrow. This man believed that God could deliver him from cancer—but whether he did or not, God was still God, God would give the even better deliverance, and the man would trust him.

Many tears followed but very few fears or worries. He had been trained in his Father’s schoolroom over the years, and he had listened well.

Do you aspire to such a response?

It is possible. Even better, you should expect the Father to do this kind of powerful work in your own heart.

Here are some other people who knew the manna principle.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you
in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16–18)

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are Jewish teenagers. They are captives with many of their countrymen in Babylon. These three had been selected to be treated specially by the king to see whether they might prove useful as advisors.

They are ordinary young men living in exile before the time when the Spirit of God is poured out. They have never actually seen God deliver anyone. They have only read about his goodness and power, in the Exodus story. But that is enough for them to be confident that their God reigns over the rulers of the world and gives grace to his people when they need it.

Notice how they apply the Exodus story. They believe that God certainly can deliver them from the furnace, but they also know that he can have other plans for them that do not include immediate deliverance. What they know for certain is this:

- We trust in God not because he delivers us from every fearful situation, but because he alone is King.
- He will always be with us in fearful situations.
- He will deliver his people, but at times his deliverance will be more sophisticated than we can understand. We might have hope that he delivers us from a negative job review with a supervisor, while he is actually doing a cosmic deliverance that will include all creation.

These three Hebrew men anticipate death by fire, which must be at the top of anyone’s worst nightmare list.

Their response? They simply trust God.

God might bring deliverance that saves you from your present difficulty, but he might not. You don’t trust in deliverance; you trust in God.
Do you think such trust is possible? Don’t forget, these three men did not yet have the Spirit of God in the way that you do.

At this point, you know one thing for certain: God will give you grace when you need it. You can’t imagine being thrown into the fire. If you tried, you might think that if it were to happen your fear would be so intense that you might die before you even saw the flames, which, of course, is what you would prefer. But God promises to give you grace if such a thing were to ever happen to you, and that grace would be much better than what you can imagine. In fact, don’t even bother to imagine it because you can’t. You don’t have the grace yet. That will come on another day.

Let the manna principle lead you in prayer. Start with thanks because he has delivered you and will deliver you. And, while you are at it, you could also confess how, in your fears and anxieties, you are a false prophet.

Here is a different prophecy, and it can become your desire:

When I am afraid,
   I will trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
   in God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can mortal man do to me? (Psalm 56:3–4)
The God of Suspense Reveals His Plans

Keep Psalm 56 in mind as you write out a prayer of confession and trust to your heavenly Father.

**Week 2 Goals:**

* To know that God gives a *better* deliverance
* To be able to give examples of a better deliverance
* To make the manna story *your* story
* To be able to give examples of what form manna, or grace, can take