



SCARLET HILTIBIDAL



ANXIOUS



FIGHTING ANXIETY WITH
THE WORD OF GOD



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DEDICATION

For Kaye Geiger, who led me through Bible studies on her living room floor, who discipled me without me knowing it by letting me come through the unlocked garage door, and who helped me laugh and cry and pray and learn.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scarlet Hiltibidal is the author of *Afraid of All the Things* and *He Numbered the Pores on My Face*. She writes regular columns for *ParentLife Magazine* and devotionals for *She Reads Truth* and enjoys speaking to women around the country about the freedom and rest available in Jesus. Scarlet has a degree in biblical counseling and taught elementary school before she started writing. She and her husband live in Southern California, where she loves signing with her three daughters, eating nachos by herself, writing for her friends, and studying stand-up comedy with a passion that should be reserved for more important pursuits.

session
One

INTRODUCTION

Anxious to be Here

"I HAVE TOLD YOU
THESE THINGS
SO THAT **IN ME**
YOU MAY HAVE
PEACE. YOU WILL
HAVE SUFFERING
IN THIS WORLD. BE
COURAGEOUS!
I HAVE **CONQUERED**
THE WORLD."

John 16:33



INTRODUCTION

We live in a broken, sad, scary place. There is plenty to be anxious about:

- dying
- black holes
- cancer
- the fact that our phones have cameras on them that just sort of turn on sometimes
- hurricanes
- failing as friend/daughter/teammate/student/wannabeTikTok® dancer

And the world is full of insufficient solutions for our anxiety:

- food
- clothes
- friends
- hobbies
- achievements
- _____.

Here's the thing. Nothing really works every-moment-all-the-time-perfectly-and-forever, right? Have you gotten to that point? Your closet is full of clothes, but your heart is still full of worry. You make the team, win the award, and achieve the goal, but instead of the peace it promises, you only find more fears. The bottom of the queso cup appears alarmingly fast, and you're left asking yourself—maybe out loud—*AM I JUST MORE MESSED UP THAN EVERYONE ELSE?*

I've been in that place so many times. I've been a slave to my panic, planning and avoiding and doing everything I could to insulate myself from pain and discomfort. But none of it worked.

So I made my life quiet. Isolated. "Under control."

I thought that would make me peaceful.

It didn't. Isolation and "control" might produce a quieter life, but peace isn't a quiet life; peace is a quiet soul. Peace is the gift of Jesus through the work of Jesus that we can have no matter what is going on in our living rooms or at school or on our Instagram® feeds. The loudest of lives can't overwhelm the quiet that comes from Christ.

True peace comes when we learn to hold God's Word up to what worries us. There, we learn we can't fix ourselves; we can't protect ourselves. Instead, the Bible tells us we can rest, knowing Jesus walked into the broken, sad, scary place to rescue us and love us. He is the One who fixes. His is the only protection that matters.

When we fear the Lord rather than fearing the brokenness in our world, we can take hold of the perfect peace that is only available in Him.

The peace we are looking for is found in the already finished work of Christ (more on that later) revealed to us over and over again in God's Word, through prayer, and with our Christian community. When those of us who live with tornado awareness and constant cancer concern see the power of Jesus in the pages of the Bible, we can say with certainty, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Ps. 118:6, ESV).



WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

In this study, we'll look at different people in the Bible and what we can learn from them about anxiety, along with how to live in freedom by clinging to God's Word and God's gospel in community and in prayer. This Bible study book will challenge you to study Scripture as you fight your worries. It will help you put some spiritual disciplines in place that will aid you in keeping your eyes on the cross of Christ even if you've just seen a video show up on your social media feed about the real-life dangers of black holes.



HOW DO I USE THIS STUDY?

This study is meant to be used in a small group setting. You are welcome to do this book on your own, but the study is designed to be done with others. Fighting anxiety alone is a lot like fighting an army alone. Imagine walking onto a battlefield by yourself while surrounded by enemies with bigger guns and stronger muscles. Actually, don't imagine that. This is supposed to help you with your anxiety, not add to it.

Every person should have her own workbook, a Bible, a pen, and some snacks.¹ In this book, you'll find personal study that you can do individually and a memory verse that you can learn on your own (and review together as a group). Also, flip to pages 186–187 in the Appendix to keep some of my favorite on-the-go, anxiety-blasting Scriptures handy! Then, when you come together, you'll watch a video and discuss your answers from the week's work as a group. I hope this study helps you as you engage with Scripture personally, and I hope you can use your personal study and experiences to encourage the other people in your group when you meet together.

During the final session of this study, we'll dive into what God's Word says about fighting anxiety together—why it is important and how the body of Christ is so vital in our approach to combating the lies anxiety tells us.

1. Snacks are not required, but highly recommended.

WHAT IF I NEED MORE THAN A BIBLE STUDY?

This study probably won't fix all your problems.

In 2004, Tim Keller preached a sermon called, "The Wounded Spirit." It had such an effect on me that I shared a good portion of it in the book I wrote about my personal fight with fear—*Afraid of All the Things*.

The thing is, I've been on anxiety pills. I've sat across from Christian psychiatrists while they offered big-word diagnoses to explain my particular version of anxiety.

I lived years feeling shame and fear over my mental weaknesses. I thought if my friends really knew how I struggled in my mind, they would reject me.

This sermon changed that for me. In it, Keller talked about different sources that might contribute to our woundedness and weakness. He didn't say, "Why are you so messed up? Just pray more!" He said, ". . . you know what the biblical answer is? It's complicated."²

That's what I want you to hear from me as you walk into this study. Your brain is complicated. Your anxiety could be rooted in an existential issue, or maybe for you, it's mostly physical. Maybe you have a bum thyroid. (I had mine taken out last year and the hormonal imbalance it causes can absolutely lead to anxiety and depression.) Maybe, as Proverbs 28:1 says, you flee "when no one pursues" (ESV) because you are intentionally walking in "wickedness." In that case, medication or a therapy session won't fix you like repentance will.

There are many contributing factors. We must rely on prayer and God's Word, but we can do so while knowing that we might be dealing with physical sources or sin sources or emotional sources or existential (the BIG questions, like *What is life?*) sources. It's important to recognize these things as you fight your personal battle in your own personal way.

WHO CAN YOU TALK TO?

If you find yourself needing a bit more support than this study offers, talk to a trusted adult (like your parents or small group leader) about what is going on. I can look back on so many times in my own life that I needed help, and my Christian community, older family members, and counselors definitely held me together during those times.

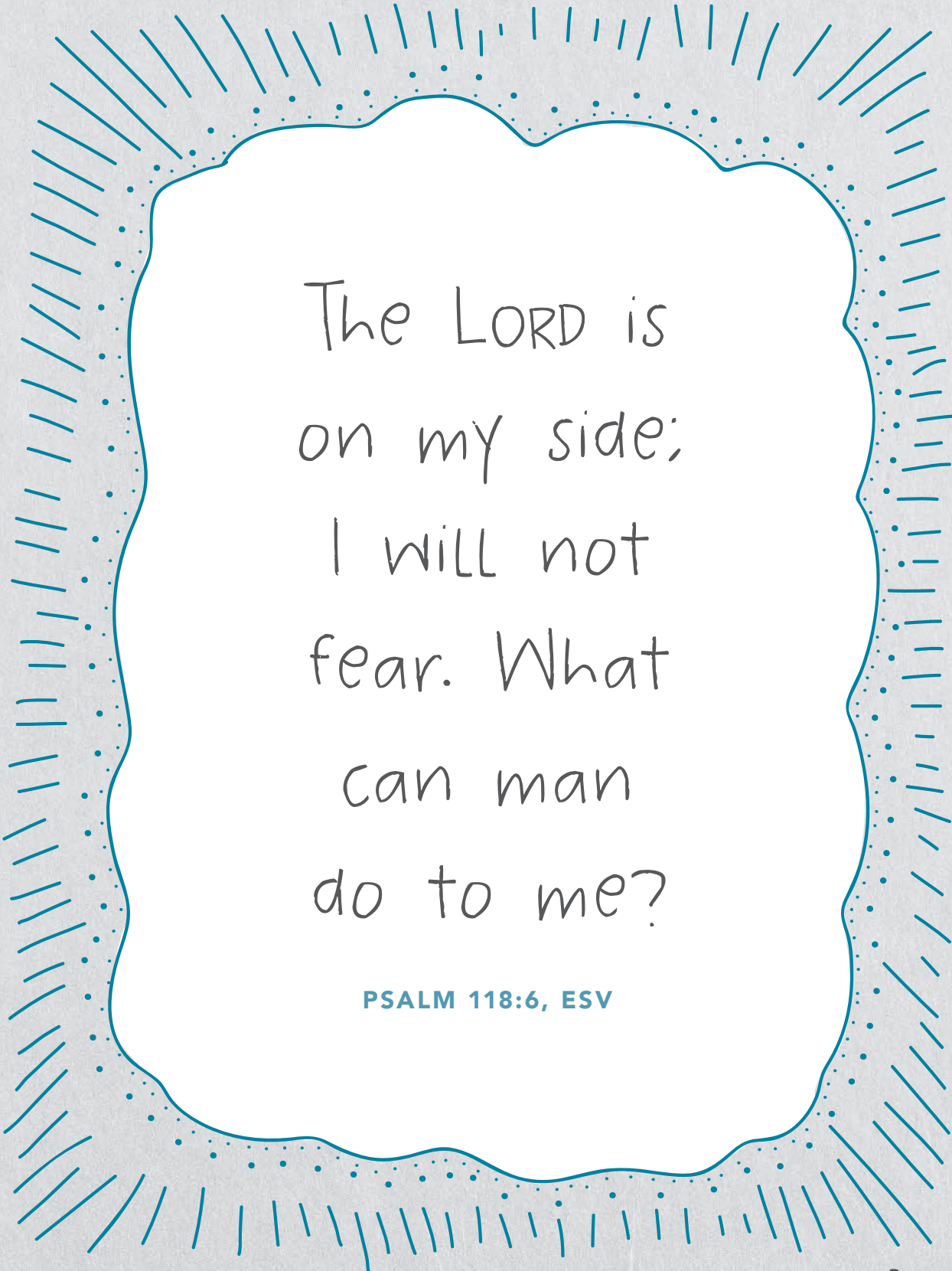
WILL IT ALWAYS BE THIS WAY?

About that “ultimate peace”—I’ve never written from the stance of “I’ve overcome anxiety and so can you.” If you’re looking for ten easy steps, you won’t find that here. In our broken world, it’s a constant temptation to find a final fix. We hope to check the box and expect smooth sailing from then on. We will absolutely have smooth sailing someday—just not in this world. The seas of this world have hurricanes. But the Lord has reminded me again and again, through His Word and His Spirit, that ultimate peace is our hope *someday*, but abundant life is available *today*.

Forever peace is coming, but present peace must be pursued.

We must learn to expect and accept the suffering Jesus promised us—“In this world you will have trouble . . .” (John 16:33, NIV)—all the while straining to see through all the sad and scary to the second half of the verse. There is Jesus, who tells us, “. . . take heart! I have overcome the world” (NIV).

My hope is you’ll walk into this study not looking for magic words that make fear disappear from your life forever, but rather looking to and leaning on Jesus, who has already overcome everything that makes you anxious.



The LORD is
on my side;
I will not
fear. What
can man
do to me?

PSALM 118:6, ESV

This upcoming week, you will complete the personal study for "Session Two: Anxious David." When you get back together next week, you will watch a video on Session Two and discuss your answers. But for now, just watch the Session One video and use the discussion guide below to get to know one another.

WATCH

As you watch the video for Session One of *Anxious*, feel free to write any notes down in the sidebar and fill in the blanks below as you go.

1. We can have _____.
2. We will have _____.
3. _____ has conquered the _____.

DISCUSS

- Share your names, favorite restaurants, and current favorite things.
- Do you struggle with anxiety? Describe what that battle looks like.
- Have you seen anxiety affect any of your friends, teammates, classmates? Explain.
- What are some ways you have tried to fight anxiety in the past? What helped? What didn't?

- Read John 16:33 together. Which of the three parts of the verse that were highlighted in the video stood out to you? Why?
- How does it comfort you to know that peace is available to you?
- Does it surprise you that Jesus guarantees there will be trouble in life? Why or why not?
- Why must Jesus be the only One you set your eyes on when you are anxious?

PRAY

As a group, take turns sharing prayer requests and figuring out how you want to pray for one another throughout the week. Maybe someone wants to take notes and send out a weekly text. Maybe you could all write your requests in a notebook. Find out what works for your group and make sure you have a way to touch base throughout the week. Close in prayer.

session
Two

Anxious David

JESUS IS OUR SHIELD IN
THE FIGHT AGAINST ANXIETY.

MANY SAY ABOUT
ME, “THERE IS NO
HELP FOR HIM IN
GOD.” *SELAH*.
BUT YOU, LORD,
ARE **A SHIELD
AROUND ME**, MY
GLORY, AND THE
ONE WHO LIFTS UP
MY HEAD.

Psalm 3:2-3



DAY ONE PRETEND INSANITY

1 Samuel 21:10-15 and Psalm 34

I have a lot of great conversations with myself while boiling water. When I'm doing tedious things around the house, my mind tends to wander to hypothetical relational problems. *What if there's assigned seating at my step cousin's baby shower in two months, and what if her former roommate/friend is there and we're seated right next to each other, and what if she asks if I want to get coffee with her sometime, which should be no big deal. I guess the normal answer is "Sure!," but last time we did that, she asked me a lot of personal questions and I just felt like her next question might be if she could have one of my kidneys should she ever need one. So what am I going to say if she asks about getting coffee together? Maybe I just shouldn't go to the baby shower.*

I'm exaggerating, but please tell me I'm not the only one who practices conversations for uncomfortable scenarios that don't actually exist yet.

Check one.

- You're the only one who does this.
- You too? This is exactly why I don't boil water.

It sounds really weird when I think about it, but that's what my brain does. Sometimes I'm afraid of people and the potential problems that come with people, and I think I can conversation-practice my way to peace. Let's see what David did when he was worried about potential relational conflict.

Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15. How did David act in the face of a threat to his safety? Write any observations in the space below.



"David took this to heart and became very afraid of King Achish of Gath, so he pretended to be insane in their presence. He acted like a madman around them."

1 SAMUEL 12:12-13a (CSB)



Today, in 1 Samuel, we read about when David was so afraid of how King Achish might treat him that he pretended to be a crazy person. Pretty brilliant, right? It is amazing how our worries can lead us to behave. Maybe you tend to get tense and angry when you feel anxious about how others think about you or what they might say or do to you. Maybe you get defensive. Or maybe you isolate and put your phone on airplane mode so the texts and expectations can just stop for one minute, please!

How do you tend to struggle when it comes to relational anxiety?

Read Psalm 34.

Psalm 34 was actually written by David about this very time in his life—when he pretended to be a crazy person in the presence of Abimelech (probably the same guy mentioned earlier as "King Achish" in 1 Sam. 21:10-15).¹ David clearly knew what it was like to be anxious when he wrote this psalm.

Now let's focus on verses 1-4 of Psalm 34 for a second. How would you describe David's posture as he shared this message?

Sometimes, when I'm afraid, I forget how to pray. I forget how to think like a daughter of God. I panic and don't know what to say.

What do your prayers to the Lord sound like when you're stuck in a panic?

In verse 4, David said he "sought the LORD." Read the verse again and write what the Lord did as a result.

What do you think it means to seek the Lord?





What does verse 5 say is a result of looking to God?

When was the last time you felt joyful and void of shame? What was your relationship with God like at that time?

Read verse 8 from the CSB translation. What emotion does the Bible say people who take refuge in Him have?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how "happy" does your heart feel right now? (If you looked it up in a different translation, you may have seen the word **blessed**.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not too Happy

The Happiest

Take the next few minutes to think about what it means to take refuge in the Lord. What are some things you find refuge in apart from the Lord?

In verse 11, David talked about teaching "the fear of the LORD." Fear is not a bad thing when it is focused on our Father. It's when we fear the wrong things—the things of this world—that we might feel anxious.

What does God's Word say the fear of the Lord leads to? Look up the following verses and write the answer beside them.

Psalm 25:14 _____

Psalm 33:8 _____

Proverbs 9:10 _____

Proverbs 14:26 _____

Proverbs 14:27 _____

Proverbs 19:23 _____

Proverbs 22:4 _____

Luke 1:50 _____

When we fear the Lord, we gain. When we fear the Lord, it is easier not to worry about the things the Lord has already defeated. When we fear the Lord, we remember He is our shield and protector.

Read Psalm 34:9.

When we fear the Lord, what do we lack?

What are some misplaced fears you have right now? How does the work of Jesus impact those worries?

I'm not into war movies or battle-y things in general, but the idea of being shielded sounds awesome to me. If I could just be shielded, at all times, from danger, from conflict, from sadness . . . my heart longs for that. When I'm doing the boiling-water-conversing thing I told you about, what I'm really doing is trying to prepare and protect myself. David's interpersonal conflicts were much more murder-y than mine tend to be, but it's convicting and inspiring to me that he sought protection and refuge in the Lord.

Close out this time asking God to help you rest in the reality that He is eternally shielding you from the things that would harm your soul.