

## Chapter 1

### Let not your heart be troubled...By Terror

My daughter makes me cry. Because I have three daughters, I had better be more specific. Danielle, my youngest, makes me cry. It's not that she's bad or gets into trouble. She's innocent and gets into my heart.

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and flew them into the World Trade Center towers in Manhattan and into the Pentagon, killing thousands of innocent men, women, and children. And just as our minds were trying to wrap around the horrific scene of flames and acrid smoke belching from gaping holes in those 110-story monuments to American might and achievement, the unthinkable happened. They collapsed.

At the publishing company where I work, we tried, unsuccessfully, to concentrate on our duties. But with each update on the latest attack - the crash in rural Pennsylvania, the collapse first of tower two, then tower one - my gut twisted into a tighter knot, squeezing more and more bitter acid up my throat and into my mouth. It was the blackest day this country had ever faced, and the horror of it shook us all to our knees.

My kids were in school that day. Naturally, they were affected. The TV news was beamed into their classrooms and they witnessed again and again and again from every conceivable angle the planes, with innocent passengers aboard, slamming into those buildings. They witnessed the

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towers pancaking and disappearing in volcano-like plumes of smoke and ash... again and again and again. And for my daughters, who have a daddy who flies often, the impact was devastating.

Calls to my wife who works at the Christian school my daughters attend confirmed what I knew they must be feeling. They were terrified and weren't eating.

When I got home that evening, everyone was walking around in a daze and a palpable feeling of dread hung heavily in the air. I gathered the family in the living room for prayer. I knew my children's sense of security and well-being had been torpedoed with the same force as the World Trade Center had been torpedoed hours earlier.

I don't know if it came through in my voice, but inside I was shaking. I opened the Scriptures and did what fathers are supposed to do - I led my family to the throne of grace for help and comfort in our time of need. I turned to Psalm 91 and read those immortal words of comfort:

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,  
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you....

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If you make the Most High your dwelling -  
even the Lord, who is my refuge -  
then no harm will befall you,  
no disaster will come near your tent.  
For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways (w. 3-11).

I then turned to the words of Jesus and read His own account of what life would be like just before He comes again. I was attempting, through scripture, to reestablish our faith as a family in God and in the hope of a better world beyond the one that was reeling beneath us at that moment.

The kids were quiet; their young faces grim with worry. Danielle was curled up on her mother's lap in nearly a fetal position.

It happened about the time I started mentioning prayer for the families of those who were lost in the attacks. Suddenly, Dani couldn't hold back the dam of emotion any longer. Her eight-year-old face twisted in pain. Her mouth opened and quiet sobs began to spill out. Instantly I felt hot tears spring to my own eyes, momentarily blurring my vision. A pang of agony stabbed my chest like a knife and I had to look away to maintain my composure. Until that moment, I hadn't cried. As awful as that day had been, I hadn't shed tears. But the sight of my youngest child weeping in sympathy for the victims and in fear for her safety and that of her family, got to me.

Dads are supposed to make their children feel safe and secure. On September 11 I realized how difficult it would be to do that from that day forward.

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A week and a half later, she got to me again. On the morning I wrote these very words, I was headed to the garage to get in my car and drive to the airport. This was to be my first flight since the tragedy and emotions were running high. Everyone was trying their best to be brave and not say what they were thinking. No one needed to say anything.

We had just had prayer as a family and, in keeping with our custom whenever someone leaves on a trip, we hugged and gave each other “blessings” in the name of the Lord. (See Numbers 6:24-27.) As I went to hug and bless Danielle, I noticed her long face. I could tell she was struggling with her fears. I had held her close and kissed her forehead in reassurance, but as I reached the pantry, I worried about my little girl. How I wanted to assure her that everything was going to be alright. And that’s when she got me again.

Before I could get out the door, Dani slipped up behind me and thrust a piece of paper in my line of sight. “Here, Daddy,” she said soberly. “Look at it when you’re on the plane.”

“OK, Sweetheart,” I replied. Whoosh! As quickly as she came, she was gone. I turned the paper over and looked down on a drawing that spoke volumes. In the simple style of an eight-year-old, was a drawing of me with luggage in my hands, and standing next to me a smiling angel, my guardian and companion.

Once again I felt a lump in my throat and a sting in my eyes. My Dani wanted to reassure me that I was not going to be alone on my flight - God and His angels were going to be with me. Her simple message to me that morning is the message I want to bring you in the pages of this little book:

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When troubles come - as they surely will - you are not alone; God is with you.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” Jesus said to His disciples. “You believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1, KJV). But how are we to do this? With scenes of unspeakable horror permanently etched into the memory chips in our brains; with the economic stability of our nation teetering on the brink of collapse; with the relatively carefree lifestyle that we Americans have always enjoyed (and taken for granted) becoming a thing of the past, how are we to relate to these words of Jesus? Even as we grieve and our hearts ache with pain, how do we not let our hearts be “troubled”?

I wrote these words from seat 13B on Horizon flight #2391 from Boise to Seattle. The date was September 21 - the day after President Bush readied the nation for war in a historic joint session of Congress. I wondered how I would feel. I anticipated a miserable flight - miserable with my own apprehensions and imaginings of a terrorist in every seat. But you know what? That angel that my daughter drew on paper was real. Instead of dread, I felt a peace that passed understanding. And though a young high schooler was sitting next to me in 13A, I knew who else was right beside me.

For the next few pages I want us to be a family and gather around the Word of God as my family did the night of September 11. I want to revisit some of the more profound statements of assurance made by Jesus, David, and the apostle Paul - statements that will anchor our faith and help us regain our bearings in the midst of this storm we call life. Why? Because believers get shaken too. We have questions.

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We doubt. We fear. We also grieve and hurt. But we've also been given incredible spiritual truths and perspectives on life that if taken to heart, will be a shelter in the time of storm.

I need to know how to live with confidence and peace when the inexplicable happens.

So do you.

I need to know that Jesus hasn't left me alone when I feel like a two-year-old who's gotten separated from his mommy in a crowded shopping mall.

So do you.

I need to know how I'm supposed to live in and above this crazy world that can be so full of joy one moment and so full of pain the next.

So do you.

I need Jesus.

Again.

And again.

And again.

So do you.

Our need is our passport into the presence of God. He's waiting for us to come. Jesus wants to hold us close and reorient our spiritual and emotional compasses so we feel assured - again - that He is in control, and there is no need to fear.

Trouble comes in many forms, not just in the silhouette of an airplane over a city skyline. Marriages dissolve, loved ones get cancer, jobs are terminated, children rebel, aging parents must be cared for, wars, famines, and plagues take the lives of many. How do we make it through with our faith intact? The way we always have - on our knees holding the

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Word of God in one hand, and grasping hold of a smiling angel with the other.

If you re in need of an anchor today, keep reading... and hold on.

Lord, I need to know that You are still in control. Intellectually, I know this is true, but everything seems so out of control right now. Fear is a constant, and unwelcome, companion. I know I'm not supposed to put my trust in anything other than You, least of all anything in this world. But times of trouble expose who I really am and reveal where I've placed my trust. Please be my refuge from the storm. Anchor my soul in your Word and teach me how to hold on to You and not let go. Amen.