

# Living the Word

REFLECTIONS  
ON SCRIPTURE'S  
MOST BELOVED  
PASSAGES



EDITORS of  
GUIDEPOSTS

# Do Not Worry

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Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

—Matthew 6:34, KJV

I come from a long line of worriers, beginning with my mother and going back generations. Mother grew up during the Great Depression and World War II and, like many of her contemporaries, never completely stopped worrying about having “enough.” Enough food. Enough clothes. Enough heat. Enough gasoline. And on and on and on.

By the time my siblings and I came along, she’d learned to keep most of those anxieties to herself. Anytime we expressed worry about something, Mother would say, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

I was about five years old the first time she said it to me. “What does that mean?” I asked.

“It’s from the Bible,” she told me. “Jesus said it. It’s a fancy way of saying don’t worry.”

“Ah,” I said, nodding my head.

I try to live by those words. But, as in many of the things Jesus asks of us, it’s easier said than done. As a child and teenager, I worried about grades and sports and best friends and boyfriends. I grew up and had kids of my own and worried about them. Was I feeding them right? Was it OK for them to ride bicycles in the street, or should they stay on the driveway? Would they need braces? Could we afford braces? Was I helping enough with homework? Helping too much with homework?

Naturally, the worries got bigger when they became teenagers. Were they hanging out with the right kind of friends? Would they say no to alcohol and drugs? And how could I bear the thought of them driving a car?

Thankfully, they grew up just fine and have spouses and children of their own. Meaning I now have two generations behind me to worry about.

My husband of thirty-five years and I divorced when we were in our early sixties. I was filled with pain and consumed with new worries. There were times when I felt I would never again have a stress-free day or a solid night's sleep. A decade has passed since then, and I'm generally OK during the day. But nights are often difficult. It's hard to fall asleep and hard to stay asleep. And not just because the icemaker drops a load of cubes into the bin or my next-door neighbor fires up his noisy pickup truck just as I'm nodding off.

Many nights, my brain just won't shut down. Sometimes, it's filled with random crazy questions. How, exactly, does the moon affect the tides? If I went back to high school now, would algebra be harder or easier? Is sleet the same thing as freezing rain? Am I too old to learn to play the piano? Does anybody actually gather walnuts anymore and try to get to the meat? What, exactly, is the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom?

Mostly, though, my mind is filled with worries. Little worries, like how to keep squirrels off my bird feeder and trumpet vine out of my hydrangeas. Is it time to schedule a tire rotation for my car? When did I last change the furnace filter? Will the birthday card I sent to my friend get to her in time (because we all know how the mail is these days)?

But many of my worries are about big stuff. Will I need hip replacement? Knee replacement? A coronary bypass? How much longer will my fifteen-year-old car make it? Do I have

snakes in my attic? Is that better or worse than having mice in my attic? And what will I do if a snake or a mouse gets out of the attic and into my bedroom? Do the deer grazing in my yard have tick-borne diseases? Will I catch those diseases if I walk barefoot through the grass? What will I do if I lose my cell phone? What will I do if someone breaks into my house while I'm away? What will I do if someone breaks into my house while I'm home? If my dog dies before I do, how will I bury her? (She's big and I'm not a good digger.)

And there are the same old worries about my grandkids that I had about my own kids: health, school, friends, riding bicycles, driving cars.

Let's not forget gigantic worries about the whole wide world. War and pestilence. Fires and floods. Tornadoes and tsunamis. The news breaks my heart every single day. But as a citizen of Planet Earth, I feel it's my duty to stay informed.

I try to do all the "right" things when it comes to sleep. Turning off screens—TV, phone, and tablet—at least an hour before bedtime. A warm bath. A mug of herbal tea. A comfortable pillow. A cool, dark bedroom. I snuggle beneath the covers and say my prayers, confident I have eight hours of solid sleep ahead of me. Almost immediately, my mind begins to whirl. The white noise of the floor fan in the corner of my room doesn't help. Nor does playing soothing sounds—ocean waves, frogs and crickets, rain falling—on my phone. Lullabies don't help, either.

I try other tricks. Relaxing my muscles, beginning with my toes and working my way up to my neck. Relaxing my muscles going in the opposite direction. Singing the ABC song forward. Singing it backward. I picture myself in a beautiful meadow, listening to birds sing, watching butterflies flit about, and romping around with an entire litter of adorable puppies. Even that seldom works.

And then I remember what Jesus said: *Do not worry*. Sometimes whispering those three words over and over again lulls me to sleep.

When it doesn't, I reach back into my memory for the entire verse from Matthew 6:34, the one in the King James edition. I remember standing in the sunny kitchen with my mother when I was only five years old, talking about something that was worrying me. And I hear Mother's gentle voice recite these ancient words of comfort: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Almost always, my eyelids grow heavy and I fall into a deep and restful sleep.

## **Faith Step**

List your worries on paper. All of them. Then, at the top of the page—in all capital letters—write Jesus's words: DO NOT WORRY. Keep the list handy so you can refer to it when necessary.

# Ten-Finger Rule

ANNE FOLEY RAUTH

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—Philippians 4:13, NKJV

I didn't know much about soccer when our oldest son, Benjamin, started playing for his small Christian middle school. The good news: At a smaller school, everyone gets playing time (PT for short). The bad news: You might get called up for a position you've never played before at, quite literally, a moment's notice.

That's exactly what happened when Benjamin's team faced their rival school. The boy who had been playing goalie left the team, and because Benjamin was one of the taller and older boys, he was selected to step into the role. Minutes before the game, he was handed the goalie gloves and was told, "You're up." I was stunned to see him donning the goalie's special shirt and jogging out to the opposite end of the field.

Goalie, I later learned, is arguably the most important position on the team—responsible for stopping every shot and rallying the defense. Benjamin had no training or experience for this position, and I knew he needed encouragement—and fast. Not only from his family and friends on the sidelines but also from above. As the game began, I found myself silently praying, while also shouting words of encouragement from the sidelines as any former cheerleader should. "You're doing great, Ben," I said over and over, as I continued my silent petitions.

It was a brutal game. Our team was young and inexperienced and didn't score a single goal. Benjamin, as the new goalie, was kept constantly busy defending the net against a high-scoring

team. For his first game, I was proud to see that he did stop several goals. Even so, many also made their way through his gloves and into the net. As the final whistle blew, our team was defeated, and Benjamin, especially, looked crushed.

When the teams lined up to shake one another's hands at the end of the game, several members of the opposing team insulted Benjamin, saying, "You're the worst goalie we've ever played against," and "Where did they find you to play goalie?"

Benjamin was devastated, and I could see in my rearview mirror as we drove home that he was choked up and holding back tears. Even the usual treat to stop for ice cream was rejected, leaving his two younger brothers disappointed as well.

"Benjamin, I believe in you," I said softly. "And, more importantly, God believes in you, and we're going to figure this out." My words rang hollow as he went to his room, announcing he never wanted to play soccer again.

That night, as I thought and prayed about the situation, a quote from St. Augustine came to mind: "Pray as if everything depended on God. Work as if everything depended on you." Taking that advice to heart, I decided to do a little work. My high school and college didn't have soccer teams, so my knowledge was limited. But I knew it was about time to learn. I prayed for guidance and reached out to my network asking if anyone knew of a "goalie coach." (I didn't even know if such a thing existed, but I figured it couldn't hurt to ask.)

To my surprise, a friend connected me with a woman who had been a goalie in college and was willing to coach Benjamin. She told me she could help him not only improve his goalie skills but also gain confidence as an overall soccer player. I still remember one of the first lessons she taught him: "Benjamin, even the goalie can score a goal!" She recognized that he had a strong kick and wanted him to know that goalies had power and the potential to score.

With the new coach in place, we had the work part in motion, but we also needed to combine that with the prayer part. One of my favorite verses, which seemed to match our current situation, is Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Though an encouraging verse, it clearly was too long to shout from the sidelines.

One day as I thought about how I could encourage Ben during soccer games, I looked down at my hands and noticed that I have ten fingers. There are also ten words in Philippians 4:13. One word for each finger. Suddenly, I had my cheer, and the Ten-Finger Rule was born!

“Ben,” I said, “I’m going to yell something from the sideline, and it’s going to be a special signal just between you and me. I’m going to yell, ‘Ten-Finger Rule’ and hold up both my hands so you can see them. That’s your reminder that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.”

“Deal,” he replied with a small smile.

We had a goalie coach. We had prayers going up. We had our special cheer. Time for the next game.

It wasn’t as rough as the first one, but our team didn’t win. However, the goalie looked much more confident in the net. Whenever Benjamin needed encouragement, I would yell, “Ten-Finger Rule” from the sideline and hold up all ten fingers. Ben would raise his gloved hands in return, sending the secret signal back, and I could see a renewed focus on his face.

After that game, Benjamin seemed a bit more encouraged and even excited to keep practicing with the coach. The next time they met, she reminded him that the goalie is the commander on the field. “You’re not just blocking shots, Benjamin,” she said. “You’re directing the defense, coordinating the team. You run the show.”

At the next game, Benjamin started yelling instructions to everyone on the team, including his middle brother, and the

action started to happen. Miraculously, we won a game! I could see that his leadership skills were blossoming, and his teammates responded to his guidance, playing with more unity and energy.

Over the years, as Ben played throughout middle school and high school, I witnessed an incredible transformation. He had poise, gained confidence, and became the commander of each soccer team that he played for. I loved watching him play soccer, and his love for the game continued to grow each season. I cherished each game and each time I yelled, “Ten-Finger Rule!”

That goalie may not be playing soccer now, but when I text or tell him, “Ten-Finger Rule,” he immediately knows: Philippians 4:13. Short enough to shout from the sidelines and powerful enough for a child to remember who ultimately has his back and where his strength comes from.

Words to play by. Words to live by.

## **Faith Step**

Incorporating scripture into everyday life is a great way to live out your faith. Choose a scripture that you can abbreviate and use with your family during stressful situations or times when you need extra encouragement.