

breaking the fear cycle

How to
Find Peace
for Your
Anxious
Heart

Maria Furlough


Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Maria Furlough, *Breaking the Fear Cycle*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2018 by Maria Furlough

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Control Number: 2017047842

ISBN 978-0-8007-2919-6

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Maria Furlough, *Breaking the Fear Cycle*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To

My Jesus

My Dave

My sweet, sweet

Faith,

David,

Aaron,

Gideon,

and Sammy

Contents

1. Your Greatest Fear 11
 2. You Do Have a Choice 21
 3. Fear and Future Telling 32
 4. I *Will* Trust 42
 5. Wrestling Matches with God 54
 6. Believing in the Bible’s View of Suffering 67
 7. Praying Faith-Filled Prayers, Not Fear-Filled Pleas 80
 8. God’s Promises of Protection 94
 9. Taking Jesus Up on His Offer of Peace 110
 10. Living Differently, in Confidence 123
 11. The Story of You 133
- Leader’s Guide 145
- Appendix: In Case of an Emergency: *Bible Verses to Post around Your Life* 151
- Acknowledgments 154
- Notes 157



I

Your Greatest Fear

What is your *greatest* fear?

You know the one—the one that keeps you up at night, wide awake, unable to fall asleep because anxious thoughts of it coming true swirl around in your brain.

What is your *deepest* fear?

You know the kind—the kind of fear that pops into your mind and then never leaves. The kind of fear that starts with a small, itty-bitty idea and then grows into a full-blown panic attack because you actually have begun to believe that the fear *is* going to come true.

Let's be completely honest. If you are anything like me, you don't even want to take the chance of naming your fear out loud. Why? Well, because there is a tiny voice inside of you that tells you if you say it out loud, you just might jinx yourself. God fearing, God trusting, and God believing though you are, you will not take any chances when it comes to your greatest fear. Your greatest fear is your holy grail. It's yours to keep and obsess over, and you feel like there is simply nothing you can do about it.

Your fear just is. It's part of you, and you have come to accept it. Live with it. Cope with it.

I lived there once too. I lived so entrenched in fear that it became a driving force in my life without me even realizing it. Fear seeped into my relationships, my parenting, my marriage, and my home, and it found such a comfortable place in my days that I stopped fighting it.

This was me: I was the new mom, driving across town to get a much-needed nap at Grandma and Grandpa's house. It was a joyous time. With a healthy baby girl in tow, I drove and thanked God for the gift of her life. I was a mom! A real mom! And it felt like heaven on earth. Then *it* happened. My internal dialogue went something like this:

God! Thank you so much for my daughter, Faith. I love her so much, more than I thought I could love!

Wait.

I love her so much.

I love her too much.

What would I ever do if I lost her?

Wait. What would I do if I got in a car accident?

Wait. I'm driving over a bridge. What would happen if I got into a car accident and flew off this bridge into that body of water? How would I save her? What would I do?

I can't lose her. I love her too much! I would need to save her.

Then I would go home and do what any reasonable Christ-following woman would do. I would get on Biblegateway.com and search for “verse that promises I will never drive off a bridge with my baby in the backseat.”

Ah, thank goodness, there it is! “Nothing bad will ever happen to you, your sweet baby, or any future children or loved ones. I pinkie promise. Thus sayeth the Lord.” That's straight from the book of *Keep Dreaming, Maria*.

It's not there! God's Word is *good*. It is holy, reliable, powerful, mysterious, and righteous, and there are no promises that tell me my worst fears will not come true. None, nada, zip! God does not promise us a pain-free existence.

How, then, can I convince my brain *not* to fear the utter destruction of everyone and everything I hold near and dear? Since the Bible doesn't ensure me that these things will *not* happen, and I could not find the Bible verse I was looking for, I went to my second best resource: Google.

Dear Google, what do I do if I drive off a bridge with my one-month-old baby in the backseat? Sincerely yours, Maria.

First, Google says to stay calm (awesome). Then Google says to immediately roll down the windows because that will be your escape route, and soon the water will short-circuit the electricity in most makes and models. Then, while the car is filling up with water, remove your baby from the car seat. After the car is fully submerged, escape through the window with your baby and swim to safety.

There. That feels a little better. Another Band-Aid of control placed over my fear to make me feel a little less anxious. Another case of trying to logically, statistically, and informationally appease my fear instead of diving straight into the heart of the matter.

My fears kept coming. They would come in multiple forms, and my anxious brain would come up with creative ways for my worst fears to come true. Besides driving off bridges, fears would come in the form of

tsunamis (no, I don't live on the coast, but apparently that doesn't matter)

cancer

brain-eating bacteria

choking

poisoning
kidnapping
regular, non-driving-off-bridges car accidents
terrorist attack
loss of a baby
nuclear destruction

I went on, half tackling every obsessive fear that popped into my mind. Then it happened.

I was going on with my everyday life, and the moment we all dread the most *happened*. I learned that one of my worst fears was going to come true. I was pregnant with my fourth child, and at my eighteen-week ultrasound I learned that my sweet baby boy had a fatal condition. He would survive the entire pregnancy, but after he was born he would not live past a few hours.

What do you do then? What do you do when one of your greatest fears actually comes true? All those sleepless nights, endless tears, and racing hearts seemed suddenly justified because I was right! My fears were confirmed! How could I survive this? What do you do when you cannot ignore your fearful heart any longer? When the reality of all of your anxious living slams you in the face? *What can you possibly do?*

May you read this, may you hear me, and may you be reassured that the ending of the story is a good one. It's a glorious one! One in which God is fully victorious over fear *even in* the midst of the worst!

I learned that God has answers for us—good answers, reliable answers—and that there is a way to live in peaceful freedom from our fears. It is not an easy journey, but it is a journey in which God draws nearer than he has ever been before. When we turn to him, when we are in the midst of our fears and we still choose to stay put at the foot of the cross until God lifts us up, then we will find the everlasting peace and hope that our souls so desperately desire.

Let us tackle this question together and head-on: If God's Word does *not* promise us that our worst fears will not come true, then *how* are we supposed to not fear?

John 14:27 states clearly and boldly, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

It's a happy ending. I promise.

It Happened

God knew I was deathly afraid of losing a child. He also knew I was just as afraid of losing a baby during pregnancy. It is a path I knew my own mother had walked, and I politely shared with God that it was not one I ever wanted to go on. I had hopes that God would work on *my* terms because clearly God has given me a rational brain, and my rational brain deducted very logically that losing a baby was not best for my life.

I was eighteen weeks pregnant and so very excited to find out the gender of my fourth child. Naïve and unsuspecting, my husband and I went to the doctor for the ultrasound. On our way into the appointment, I remember casually discussing baby names. If it was a baby girl (which I was positive it would be), we would name her Elizabeth Maria; a baby boy, Gideon Matthew. Surely it was about to be the best day ever. Who doesn't love dreaming about what their little baby will be like?

The ultrasound technician kept asking me questions. I answered them quickly and kept asking her, "Can you tell what it is yet?" I wasn't paying attention to the concerned look on her face. I wasn't even considering the possibility that something might be wrong.

Finally, she announced it! A little boy. The Furlough family was about to add yet another boy to the pack—my fourth child, my third son—Gideon Matthew. Then her voice broke into the

silence, “Ma’am, the doctor is going to need to see you. There are some things we did not see well.”

No kidneys. No bladder.

My boy had neither.

Without kidneys, there is no amniotic fluid.

Without amniotic fluid, lungs cannot develop.

Without lungs, there is no life. No life.

Hadn’t God heard me? Didn’t he know that this was not on the list of things I could survive? Whatever happened to “God will not give you more than you can handle”? What happened to that promise? In the doctor’s office, I mustered up the courage to ask a question.

“Doctor, will he be stillborn? Will he come soon?”

“No, Maria, your baby boy will live through your entire pregnancy. He will go full term, and then he will live only for minutes or hours. I’m so sorry, Maria.”

Through my sobbing, I never felt mad at God. I never questioned his goodness or blamed him. But the fear that had gripped me for so long turned into terror, and I literally felt like I was going to die from the burden of sadness, pain, and anxiety.

I feared being pregnant with a child who was not going to live.

I feared people making comments in public about my pregnant belly.

I feared my three older children living in sadness, fear, and confusion.

I feared labor.

I feared holding him and watching him die.

I feared my milk coming in with no baby to feed.

I feared pregnancy weight gain, with no baby to show for it.

I feared loving him too much.

I feared death.

I feared pain.

This time was different. My fears were based on actual circumstances! No longer hearsay or made-up scenarios, this was real and this was happening. The Band-Aids I had created for myself no longer worked.

I no longer had a choice; I *had* to fight fear head-on. I had to go right to the heart of my fear, sword in hand, and kill fear dead once and for all. If I didn't kill the fear, the fear was going to kill me.

If I didn't kill the fear, the fear was going to kill me.

Day in and day out, from November 22, the day of Gideon's diagnosis, until March 31, the day when Gideon was born, I fought my fear. With God by my side, his Word my only hope, and through the miraculous help of the Holy Spirit, God taught me how to take aim at my fears.

My prayer for you is this: may you experience the freedom I experienced without ever having to live through the pain. My fear? It was redeemed through the life and death of my baby boy Gideon. With God at my side, I fought fear and I fought it *hard*, and God taught me a battle plan that works. May it work for you too. May it bring you hope and freedom, and may you embark with confidence on this journey, knowing full well that if he can heal a fearful soul like mine, he can heal yours too.

My assurance to you begins with this: Jesus is not a liar. If Jesus knew that the command "do not be afraid" was unattainable, he would not have asked us to do this.

In John 14, Jesus himself is at the precipice of torture. The night before he died, hours before he was about to sweat blood from anguish, he confidently spoke these words to his disciples: "*Peace* I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. *Do not* let your hearts be troubled and *do not* be afraid" (v. 27, emphasis added). Let the words of our Savior sink in for a second, and reflect on the fact that he does not lead us astray.

Peace he leaves. What does that mean? Earlier in John 14, Jesus said, “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate [the Counselor], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (vv. 25–26). Peace he leaves with us; his Holy Spirit he gives to us. Jesus does not give to us as the world gives to us! His gift of peace cannot be quantified; it cannot be counted or measured. It cannot be seen nor touched, but it *is* real. No, not as the world gives. Not the world that constantly reminds us that we have *much* to fear. Not the world that teaches us that we are not good enough, we don’t make enough, we are not worth enough, and we can’t control enough. We cannot look to Jesus to solve our fears with percentages, facts, and reassurances. But we can look to him to solve them *well*.

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

My friend, our hearts *are* troubled, aren’t they? But take it from Jesus. Take it from a man (*fully* man) who spoke these very words before he was about to surrender his life for us. Our hearts do not have to *stay* troubled.

Do not be afraid. *Do not be afraid.*

Could it be? Could it really be true? Can we really not be afraid? I say it *can* be true. I say through God’s help we can surely make it true in our lives. Jesus loves us, does not lie to us, and would not call us to something we cannot achieve.

We have given in to the lie that our fearful and anxious thoughts are more powerful than we are. We have bought into the falsity that what the world has to give is more reliable and trustworthy than what God has to give. Our thoughts do not need to rule us. We have a Savior, a holy Counselor, and a good Father who wants to do the job of being our most reliable and trustworthy source.

Today, may we take the stand to journey together. May we figure out how to fight fear and walk the road toward peace hand in hand.

Your Journey

Your journey starts here. Grab a journal, a pen, and a Bible and find a quiet place—whatever you need to make this *your time*. Your time to process and pour out and let God into the places you have been afraid to let him into. This might not be pretty, it might get hard, but will you try? Will you come with me on this journey? Will you bring into your days, your moments, and your life opportunities to let God speak into your fears? Will you allow yourself the space and the quiet to listen?

Many times I think that fears speak loudest in the silence. I think we are afraid to sit and listen because we fear what we are going to hear. Our brains can be so cruel sometimes. When we sit in the quiet, all the what-ifs tend to come. Let it happen. This time, just this once, in that moment when you begin your time of journaling and reflection, let all the fears pile up. Let them out. Make a list. Make it descriptive. Make it truthful and clear and vulnerable. You can rip it up later if you need to, but for now, make the fears real. God works in the light and not in the darkness. The only one suffering from your deepest, darkest fears is you. Bring them out! Let them flow. Give them over to a God who is willing to receive them. Will you be brave with me? I know you can do it. I know you can because you were brave enough to pick up this book and make it to this point. You have courage in you. Believe in it, tap into it, and go.

Following are some questions to work through. May I pray for you before you begin?

Father, we are about to go to a place with you that is deep and dark and painful. It hurts, and if we have to go there, we only want to go there with you! Father, will you come now? Will you walk on this journey with us? Will you whisper to us in the quiet? When the fears pour out onto the pages, I pray, God, that there you will be. I pray that your Holy Spirit

will infiltrate our hearts and that there will be no denying you are here and you are good. I pray that we will not shy away from the painful or the difficult. Instead, I pray that we will invite you in. That we will lean into you with our pain and our fears. I pray that we will be brave enough now to dig into the places to which we are afraid to journey. I pray, God, that as we sit with you, you will be our comforter, our strength, and our guide. Father, with expectancy and in the powerful name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the things in life that you are most afraid of?
2. Where are the places you most fear your thoughts going to?
3. What are your fears? Call them out by name.
4. Can you trust God with your fears? When you look at your tear-drenched list, can you see God between the lines?
5. Does your faith in God tell you that he can handle them all, that he is big enough, strong enough, and loving enough? Or does your list tell you that God is too small, too weak, and uncaring?