

B A T T L I N G
U N B E L I E F

J O H N P I P E R



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BATTLING UNBELIEF

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To
Ruth Eulalia Piper
1918–1974
May her memory be honored
in the holiness of her heirs

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INTRODUCTION



In *To End All Wars*, Ernest Gordon tells the true story of a group of POW's working on the Burma Railway during World War II. The scene was made even more unforgettable because of the movie by the same title.

The day's work had ended; the tools were being counted, as usual. As the party was about to be dismissed, the Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing. He insisted that someone had stolen it to sell to the Thais. Striding up and down before the men, he ranted and denounced them for their wickedness, and most unforgivable of all their ingratitude to the Emperor. As he raved, he worked himself up into a paranoid fury. Screaming in broken English, he demanded that the guilty one step forward to take his punishment. No one moved; the guard's rage reached new heights of violence.

"All die! All die!" he shrieked.

To show that he meant what he said, he cocked

his rifle, put it to his shoulder and looked down the sights, ready to fire at the first man at the end of them.

At that moment the Argyll [Highlander] stepped forward, stood stiffly to attention, and said calmly, "I did it."

The guard unleashed all his whipped-up hate; he kicked the helpless prisoner and beat him with his fists. Still the Argyll stood rigidly to attention, with the blood streaming down his face. His silence goaded the guard to an excessive rage. Seizing his rifle by the barrel, he lifted it high over his head and with a final howl, brought it down on the skull of the Argyll, who sank limply to the ground and did not move. Although it was perfectly clear that he was dead, the guard continued to beat him and stopped only when exhausted.

The men of the work detail picked up their comrade's body, shouldered their tools and marched back to camp. When the tools were counted again at the guard-house no shovel was missing.¹

The guard had miscounted. The young soldier who stepped forward had not stolen a shovel. He had given his life for his friends.

WHAT JUST HAPPENED? MERE DEVOTION TO DUTY?

There is more than one way to commend this young man's sacrifice. One would be to say, "That's the kind of devotion to duty we need more of in this day of self-centeredness and

cowardice.” Another would be to say—this is the way I would say it—“That is the kind of love that *faith in future grace* releases. We need far more of that kind of love in this day of self-centeredness and cowardice.”

These two ways of commending the sacrifice are not necessarily in conflict. But they might be. The first way speaks of a kind of “devotion to duty.” The second speaks of the transforming power of faith in God’s promises. In contrasting these two, we need to ask, What kind of duty was it? That is the crucial question. The external action does not tell the decisive story. What was going on in the heart—toward God and man? The Bible cautions us that people can sacrifice their lives, but not love people or God. “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). When the apostle Paul says this, he means there is a kind of “devotion to duty” that God does not honor. It gains nothing.

That may seem strange, since Jesus himself said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Yes, that is what great love does. It lays down its life. But whether that act is truly loving depends on what is going on in the heart, not just on the external action.

THE FRUIT OF FAITH IN FUTURE GRACE

Another way to describe the young soldier’s sacrifice is to say that faith in future grace welled up in his heart and gave him the love and courage to give his life for his friends. He may have thought in a flash: “Jesus, you died for me. My sins are

forgiven. I have eternal life. I love you. You are my greatest treasure. I am eager to be with you. My friends are not all ready to die. I am. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Here I come.” Perhaps he took fifteen seconds to remind himself of what Christ had done for him, and what that meant for his future after death. Then, sustained by his faith in God’s promises, he stepped out and died. This is the fruit of faith in future grace.

The difference between the sacrifice that comes from sheer devotion to duty and the sacrifice that comes from faith in God’s future grace is that the first highlights my strong resolve, and the second highlights the glory of God’s grace. The aim of this book is to magnify the value of Christ by feeding faith in future grace and helping Christians battle the opposite, namely, unbelief in God’s promises that leads to Christ-dishonoring sin.

WHERE THE BOOK CAME FROM

The eight chapters that follow are taken from a much larger book titled *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*.² These are the application chapters—the ones that actually illustrate how faith in future grace severs the root of sin and sets free the stream of love. Our focus is on the very practical challenge of how to free ourselves from anxiety, pride, misplaced shame, impatience, covetousness, bitterness, despondency, and lust. My conviction is that unbelief in the promises of God (that is, future grace) is the root that sustains the life of these sins. Hence the title: *Battling Unbelief*.

It is a risk to publish these eight chapters without the

twenty-three chapters that surround them and explain the foundations and implications found in *Future Grace*. But I think it is worth the risk. Many people move from application back to foundation rather than the reverse. So I am hopeful that discovering in this smaller book some of the way faith works to liberate us from sin will send many readers to the larger work for a deeper biblical understanding.

WE BATTLE FOR FAITH IN FUTURE GRACE

“Battling unbelief,” is another way of saying, “Living by faith in future grace.” The “unbelief” that I have in mind is the failure to trust the promises of God that sustain our radical obedience in the future. These promises refer to what God plans to do for us in the future, and that is what I mean by future grace. It is *grace*, because it is good for us and totally undeserved. And it is *future* in that it hasn’t happened to us yet but may in the next five seconds or the next five thousand years.

For the Christian the promises of God are spectacular. They relate to our immediate future, before this minute is over, and our eternal future.

- “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)
- “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” (Psalm 23:6)
- “No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:11)

- “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)
- “I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)
- “All things are yours...the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” (1 Corinthians 3:21–23)
- “For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)
- “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)
- “Neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38–39)

These, and hundreds more, are there in the Bible to sustain our faith in God’s future grace. The ultimate gift at the end of them all is God himself. Christ died not mainly to make things go well for us, but to bring us to God. “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God*” (1 Peter 3:18). “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” (Psalm 73:25). “I say to the LORD, ‘You are my

Lord; I have no good apart from you” (Psalm 16:2). “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing *Christ Jesus my Lord*” (Philippians 3:8). Jesus prays, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory*” (John 17:24). The final, best, highest, most satisfying gift of future grace is seeing and savoring God himself.³

LEARNING TO FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE

Being satisfied with all that God promises to be for us in Jesus Christ is the essence of faith in future grace. Keep in mind that when I speak of faith in future grace or satisfaction in what God promises to be for us, I am assuming that an essential part of that faith and that satisfaction is an embrace of Christ as our sin-bearing substitute whose perfect obedience to God is imputed to us through faith. In other words, faith in future grace embraces the *ground* of all the promises as well as the promises themselves. It treasures Christ as the one whose blood and righteousness provides the foundation for all future grace. *And* it treasures all that God now promises to be for us in Christ because of that foundational work. Whenever I speak of faith as being satisfied with all God is for us in Jesus, I am including all of this in that faith.

This faith is the power that severs the root of sin. Sin has power because of the promises it makes to us. It talks like this: “If you lie on your tax returns, you will have extra money to get what will make you happier.” “If you look at this pornography you will have a surge of pleasure that is better than the joys of a clear conscience.” “If you eat these

cookies when no one is watching, it will soften your sense of woundedness and help you cope better than anything else just now.” No one sins out of duty. We sin because we believe the deceitful promises that sin makes. The Bible warns “that none of you may be hardened by the *deceitfulness* of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). The promises of sin are lies.

Battling unbelief and fighting for faith in future grace means that we fight fire with fire. We throw against the promises of sin the promises of God. We take hold of some great promise God made about our future and say to a particular sin, “Match that!” In this way we do what Paul says in Romans 8:13, “By the Spirit...put to death the deeds of the body.” John Owen wrote a book on that verse and summed it up with, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.”⁴ We kill sinful deeds before they happen by cutting the root of their life: the lies of sin.

Doing this “by the Spirit” means that we trust in the power of the Spirit and then wield the “sword of the Spirit,” which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). The “word of God” is at its core the gospel, and then all that God has spoken in his revealed word. The gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection is not only the core but the foundation of all the promises of God. That is the point of the logic of Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” “All things” that we need—the fulfillment of all God’s promises—are guaranteed by the Father’s not sparing his Son. Or to put it positively, all the promises of God are secured for us because God sent his Son to live and die to cancel our sins and become our righteousness. So when I say

that we wield the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, what I mean is that we hold fast to this Christ-centered gospel truth with all its promises, and bank on them in every situation. We sever the lifeline of sin by the power of a superior promise. Or to put it more positively, we release the stream of love by faith in future grace. We become loving people by trusting in the promises of God.

JESUS LOVED LIKE THIS

The Bible says that Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:2). In other words, the greatest act of loving sacrifice that was ever performed was sustained by the confidence that God would bring Jesus through it into everlasting joy with a redeemed and worshipping people. That is the way our love is sustained as well.

But there is a difference. Our willingness to endure the sacrifices of love “for the joy that is set before us” was purchased by Jesus’ willingness to do the same. His suffering covers our sins and sets us free to love. Our suffering in the path of love is based on his. His future joy came to him as his *right*. Ours comes to us as blood-bought *grace*. His suffering is not just a model. It is the ground of our hope. We are saved from sin and judgment by his suffering. Nevertheless, both his and ours are endured “for the joy that is set before us.” His joy was a future right. Ours is future grace.

Therefore, without the death and resurrection of Jesus—that is, without *past* grace—we could expect no future grace. God’s future grace toward us was purchased and guaranteed by his past grace toward us in Jesus’ death and

resurrection. As we have seen, Paul says this in one of the greatest verses in the Bible. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (past grace), how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (future grace)?” (Romans 8:32). Notice the glorious logic of heaven: *Because* God spared his Son no pain in saving us, *therefore* he will spare no omnipotent effort to give us all that we need forever. Absolutely certain future grace will come to those who trust Christ, because God infallibly secured it in not sparing his Son.

WE BATTLE AS VICTORS

The very next verses say, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:33–34). This means that because of Christ, God has justified us. Past tense. We are now already counted righteous in Christ. No one can bring a successful charge against us. Christ died for us and lives for us. Thus, we battle unbelief and sin as those who in Christ already have the decisive victory. We already have our standing in heaven by faith in Christ. Christ is our righteousness. Christ is our perfection. We pursue holiness, not because we are not yet accepted by God, but because we are. This is the way Paul put it: “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Philippians 3:12).

So I invite you to engage with me in the battle against

unbelief in the promises of God. I invite you to fight the fight of faith in future grace. And I invite you to rejoice that we can fight this fight not as though it doesn't matter, but knowing that it matters infinitely, and that God is with us to the end: "Be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

*When I am afraid,
I put my trust in you.*

PSALM 56:3

*Cast all your anxieties on him,
because he cares for you.*

1 PETER 5:7

*Therefore do not be anxious, saying,
“What shall we eat?” or
“What shall we drink?” or
“With what shall we wear?”
For the Gentiles seek after all these things,
and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

MATTHEW 6:31–32

Chapter One

BATTLING
ANXIETY



A PERSONAL TRIUMPH
THROUGH FUTURE GRACE

When I was in junior and senior high school, I could not speak in front of a group. I became so nervous that my voice would completely choke up. It was not the common butterflies that most people deal with. It was a horrible and humiliating disability. It brought immense anxiety into my life. I could not give oral book reports in school. I couldn't run for any class offices at school, because I would have had to make campaign speeches. I could only give very short—several word—answers to the questions teachers would ask in class. In algebra class I was ashamed of how my hands shook when doing a problem on the blackboard. I couldn't lead out on the Sundays when our church gave the service over to the youth.

There were many tears. My mother struggled with me through it all, supporting me and encouraging me. We were

sustained by God's grace, even though the "thorn" in my flesh was not removed. I managed to make it to college without any significant public speaking. But the battle with anxiety was intense. I knew that my life would be incredibly limited if there were no breakthrough. And I suspected that I would not be able to get through college without public speaking. In fact, Wheaton College required a speech class in those days. It loomed in front of me like a horrible concrete barricade.

In all these years, the grace of God had driven me deeper into God in desperation, rather than driving me away from God in anger. I thank God for that, with all my heart. Out of that maturing relationship came the sense that there just had to be a breakthrough.

One crucial opportunity came in Spanish class my freshman year. All of us had to give a short speech in Spanish in front of the rest of the class. There was no way around it. I felt like this was a make-or-break situation. Even as I write about it now, I don't laugh. I memorized the speech cold. I thought that memorizing would mean that I wouldn't have to look down at notes, and possibly lose my place, and have one of those horrible, paralyzing pauses. I also arranged to speak from behind a large tree-stump lectern that I could hold onto so that my shaking might be better controlled. But the main thing I did was cry out to God and lay hold on his promises of future grace. Even now the tears come to my eyes as I recall walking back and forth on Wheaton's front campus, pleading with God for a breakthrough in my life.

I don't remember those three moments of Spanish very clearly. I only remember that I made it through. Everyone knew I was nervous. There was that terrible silence that falls

when people feel bad for you and don't know how to respond. But they didn't snicker, as so many kids had done in previous years. And the teacher was kind with his comments. But the overwhelming thing was that I got through it. Later I poured out my thanks to God in the autumn sunshine. Even now I feel deep gratitude for the grace God gave me that day.

Perhaps the most decisive event of the breakthrough came over a year later. I was staying at college for summer school. Chaplain Evan Welch invited me to pray in the summer school chapel. Several hundred students and faculty would be present. My first reaction was immediate rejection of the idea. But before I could turn it down, something stopped me. I found myself asking, "How long does the prayer have to be?" He said it didn't matter. It should just be from my heart.

Now this I had never even tried—to speak to God in front of hundreds of people. I amazed myself by saying I would do it. This prayer, I believe, proved to be a decisive turning point in my life. For the first time, I made a vow to God. I said, "Lord, if you will bring me through this without letting my voice break, I will never again turn down a speaking opportunity for you out of anxiety." That was 1966. The Lord answered with precious grace again, and to my knowledge, I have kept my vow.

There is more to the story as one future grace has been lavished on another. I do not presume to understand fully all the purposes of God in his timing. I would not want to relive my high-school years. The anxiety, the humiliation and shame, were so common, as to cast a pall over all those

years. Hundreds of prayers went up, and what came down was not what I wanted at the time—the grace to endure. My interpretation now, thirty years later, is that God was keeping me back from excessive vanity and worldliness. He was causing me to ponder weighty things in solitude, while many others were breezily slipping into superficial patterns of life.

The Bible my parents gave me when I was fifteen is beside me right now on the table. It is well-marked. The assurance of Matthew 6:32 is underlined in red: “Your heavenly father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (KJV). Already in those early teen years I was struggling to live by faith in future grace. The victories were modest, it seems. But, oh, how faithful and kind God has been.

THE ASSOCIATES OF ANXIETY

In the decades that have followed I have learned much more about the fight against anxiety. I have learned, for instance, that anxiety is a condition of the heart that gives rise to many other sinful states of mind. Think for a moment how many different sinful actions and attitudes come from anxiety. Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things. So if anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins.

THE ROOT OF ANXIETY

I have also learned something about the *root* of anxiety and the ax that can sever it. One of the most important texts has been the one I underlined when I was fifteen—the whole section of Matthew 6:25–34. Four times in this passage Jesus says that his disciples should not be anxious. Verse 25: “Do not be anxious about your life.” Verse 27: “Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Verse 31: “Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’” Verse 34: “Do not be anxious about tomorrow.”

Anxiety is clearly the theme of this text. It makes the root of anxiety explicit in verse 30: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little *faith*?” In other words, Jesus says that the root of anxiety is inadequate faith in our Father’s future grace. As unbelief gets the upper hand in our hearts, one of the effects is anxiety. The root cause of anxiety is a failure to trust all that God has promised to be for us in Jesus.

I can think of two kinds of disturbed responses to this truth. Let me tell you what they are and then give a biblical response to each of them before we look more closely at the battle against the unbelief of anxiety.

IS THIS GOOD NEWS?

One response would go like this: “This is not good news! In fact, it is very discouraging to learn that what I thought was a mere struggle with an anxious disposition is rather a far

deeper struggle with whether I trust God.” My response to this is to agree, but then to disagree. Suppose you had been having pain in your stomach and had been struggling with medicines and diets of all kinds to no avail. And then suppose that your doctor tells you, after a routine visit, that you have cancer in your small intestine. Would that be good news? You say: Emphatically not! And I agree.

But let me ask the question another way: Are you glad the doctor discovered the cancer while it is still treatable, and that indeed it can be very successfully treated? You say, yes, I am very glad that the doctor found the real problem. Again I agree. So finding out that you have cancer is not good news. It's bad news. But, in another sense, it is good to find out, because knowing what is really wrong is good, especially when your problem can be treated successfully.

That's what it's like to learn that the real problem behind anxiety is unbelief in the promises of God's future grace. In a sense, it's not good news, because the unbelief is a very serious cancer. But in another sense it is good news because knowing what is really wrong is good, especially because unbelief can be treated so successfully by our Great Physician. He is able to work in wonderfully healing ways when we cry out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

So I want to stress that finding out the connection between our anxiety and our unbelief is, in fact, very good news, because it is the only way to focus our fight on the real cause of our sin and get the victory that God can give us by the therapy of his Word and his Spirit. When Paul said, “Fight the *good* fight of faith,” (1 Timothy 6:12), he called it *good* because the fight is focused on exactly the right cancer: unbelief.

HOW CAN I HAVE ANY ASSURANCE AT ALL?

There is another possible response to the truth that our anxiety is rooted in our failure to live by faith in future grace. It goes like this: “I have to deal with feelings of anxiety almost every day; and so I feel like my faith in God’s grace must be totally inadequate. So I wonder if I can have any assurance of being saved at all.”

My response to this concern is a little different. Suppose you are in a car race and your enemy, who doesn’t want you to finish the race, throws mud on your windshield. The fact that you temporarily lose sight of your goal, and start to swerve, does not mean that you are going to quit the race. And it certainly doesn’t mean that you are on the wrong race track. Otherwise the enemy wouldn’t bother you at all. What it means is that you should turn on your windshield wipers and use your windshield washer.

When anxiety strikes and blurs our vision of God’s glory and the greatness of the future that he plans for us, this does not mean that we are faithless, or that we will not make it to heaven. It means our faith is being attacked. At first blow, our belief in God’s promises may sputter and swerve. But whether we stay on track and make it to the finish line depends on whether, by grace, we set in motion a process of resistance—whether we fight back against the unbelief of anxiety. Will we turn on the windshield wipers and will we use our windshield washer?

Psalm 56:3 says, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” Notice it does not say, “I never struggle with fear.” Fear

strikes, and the battle begins. So the Bible does not assume that true believers will have no anxieties. Instead, the Bible tells us how to fight when they strike. For example, 1 Peter 5:7 says, “[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” It does *not* say, You will never feel any anxieties. It says, When you have them, cast them on God. When the mud splatters your windshield and you temporarily lose sight of the road and start to swerve in anxiety, turn on your wipers and squirt your windshield washer fluid.

So my response to the person who has to deal with feelings of anxiety every day is to say, That’s more or less normal. At least it is for me, ever since my teenage years. The issue is, how do we fight them?

THE TWO GREAT FAITH BUILDERS

The answer to that question is: We fight anxieties by fighting *against* unbelief and fighting *for* faith in future grace. And the way you fight this “good fight” is by meditating on God’s assurances of future grace and by asking for the help of his Spirit. The windshield wipers are the promises of God that clear away the mud of unbelief, and the windshield washer fluid is the help of the Holy Spirit. The battle to be freed from sin is “by the *Spirit*” (Romans 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2) and by “the truth” (John 17:17, 19). The work of the Spirit and the Word of truth—especially the foundational truth of the gospel that guarantees all the promises of God. These are the great faith builders.

Without the softening work of the Holy Spirit, the wipers of the Word just scrape over the blinding clumps of unbelief.

Both are necessary—the Spirit and the Word. We read the promises of God and we pray for the help of his Spirit. And as the windshield clears so that we can see the welfare that God plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11), our faith grows stronger and the swerving of anxiety smoothes out.

SEVEN PROMISES OF FUTURE GRACE AGAINST ANXIETY

How does this actually work in practice? Here in Matthew 6 we have the example of anxiety about food and clothing. Even in America, with its extensive welfare system, anxiety over finances and housing can be intense. But Jesus says in verse 30 that this stems from inadequate faith in our Father's promise of future grace: "O you of *little faith*." And so this paragraph has at least seven promises designed by Jesus to help us fight the good fight against unbelief and be free from anxiety.

Promise #1

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?
(Matthew 6:25)

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God does the greater, then doing the lesser is all the more sure. In this verse, the greater thing is that God has given us life and bodies. These are vastly more complex and difficult to maintain than the

mere provision of clothing. Yet God has done it. Therefore, how much more easily can God provide us with food and clothing. Moreover, no matter what happens, God will raise your body someday and preserve your life for his eternal fellowship.

Promise #2

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:26)

If God is willing and able to feed such insignificant creatures as birds who cannot do anything to bring their food into being—as you can by farming—then he will certainly provide what you need, because you are worth a lot more than birds.

Promise #3

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? (Matthew 6:27–28)

This is a promise of sorts—the simple promise of reality: Anxiety will not do you any good. It's not the main argument, but sometimes we just have to get tough with ourselves and say, "Soul, this fretting is absolutely useless. You are not only messing up your own day, but a lot of other people's as well. Leave it with God and get on with your work." Anxiety accomplishes nothing worthwhile.

Promise #4

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:28–30)

Compared to the flowers of the field you are a much higher priority for God, because you will live forever, and can thus bring him eternal praise. Nevertheless, God has such an overflow of creative energy and care, he lavishes it on flowers that last only a matter of days. So he will certainly take that same energy and creative skill and use it to care for his children who will live forever.

Promise #5

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (Matthew 6:31–32)

Do not think that God is ignorant of your needs. He knows all of them. And he is your “heavenly Father.” He does not look on indifferently, from a distance. He cares. He will act to supply your need when the time is best.

Promise #6

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

If you will give yourself to his cause in the world, rather than fretting about your private material needs, he will make sure that you have all you need to do his will and give him glory. This is similar to the promise of Romans 8:32, “Will [God] not also with [Christ] freely give us all things?”⁵

Promise #7

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:34)

God will see to it that you are not tested in any given day more than you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). He will work for you, so that “as your days, so shall your strength be” (Deuteronomy 33:25). Every day will have no more trouble than you can bear; and every day will have mercies sufficient for that day’s stress (Lamentations 3:22–23).

“MY GOD WILL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS”

Paul learned these lessons from Jesus and applied them to the battle against anxiety in the church at Philippi. In Philippians 4:6 he said, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every-

thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” And then in verse 19 he gives the liberating promise of future grace, just as Jesus did: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” If we live by faith in this promise of future grace, it will be very hard for anxiety to survive. God’s “riches in glory” are inexhaustible. He really means for us not to worry about our future.

WHEN I AM ANXIOUS

We should follow the pattern of Jesus and Paul. We should battle the unbelief of anxiety with the promises of future grace. When I am anxious about some risky new venture or meeting, I battle unbelief with one of my most often-used promises, Isaiah 41:10. The day I left for three years in Germany my father called me long distance and gave me this promise on the telephone. For three years I must have quoted it to myself five hundred times to get me through periods of tremendous stress. “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10). When the motor of my mind is in neutral, the hum of the gears is the sound of Isaiah 41:10.

When I am anxious about my ministry being useless and empty, I fight unbelief with the promise of Isaiah 55:11. “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

When I am anxious about being too weak to do my

work, I battle unbelief with the promise of Christ, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

When I am anxious about decisions I have to make about the future, I battle unbelief with the promise, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you” (Psalm 32:8).

When I am anxious about facing opponents, I battle unbelief with the promise, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

When I am anxious about the welfare of those I love, I battle unbelief with the promise that if I, being evil, know how to give good things to my children, how much more will “your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11). And I fight to maintain my spiritual equilibrium with the reminder that everyone who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for Christ’s sake will “receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30).

When I am anxious about being sick, I battle unbelief with the promise, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19). And I take the promise with trembling: “Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3–5).

When I am anxious about getting old, I battle unbelief

with the promise, “Even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save” (Isaiah 46:4).

When I am anxious about dying, I battle unbelief with the promise that “none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:7–9).

When I am anxious that I may make shipwreck of my faith and fall away from God, I battle unbelief with the promises, “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6); and, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

This is the way of life that I am still learning as I enter my seventh decade. I write this book in the hope, and with the prayer, that you will join me. Let us make war, not with other people, but with our own unbelief. It is the root of anxiety, which, in turn, is the root of so many other sins. So let us turn on our windshield wipers and use the washer fluid, and keep our eyes fixed on the precious and very great promises of God. Take up the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit for help, lay the promises up in your heart, and fight the good fight—to *live by faith in future grace*.

Thus says the LORD:
“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
let not the mighty man boast in his might,
let not the rich man boast in his riches,
but let him who boasts boast in this,
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD who practices
steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

JEREMIAH 9:23–24

*The pleasure of pride is like the pleasure of scratching.
If there is an itch one does want to scratch;
but it is much nicer to have neither the itch
nor the scratch.*

*As long as we have the itch of self-regard
we shall want the pleasure of self-approval;
but the happiest moments are those when we forget our
precious selves and have neither but have everything else
(God, our fellow humans, animals,
the garden and the sky) instead.*

C.S. LEWIS

*Humble yourselves... under the mighty hand of God
so that at the proper time he may exalt you.*

1 PETER 5:6