

## STUDY GUIDE

**Monday, November 16** - **"The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus'"** (Luke 1:28-31, NIV). No one knows for sure, but most experts speculate that Mary was around thirteen to fifteen years old when she gave birth to Jesus. Everyone can agree that she was extremely young. So the angel Gabriel shows up and greets Mary, tells her not to be afraid, and oh, by the way, you're going to have a baby. And not just any baby, this baby will be God's Son. In Mary's day, she could have been stoned by Jewish custom for being betrothed and ending up pregnant by another. Or Joseph could have sought a divorce from her. From an earthly perspective, she faced an uncertain future. And how does she respond? **"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38, NIV).** Did God have to run a background check on Mary? He knew exactly who He had selected, and her response was the perfect answer. So what made her the perfect young lady for this assignment? Did Mary have any special training or lots of money? Most likely, Mary was poor, but she was pure and highly favored by God. Most importantly, she was willing to be used by God. Has the Lord asked you to step up and take on something that feels uncomfortable or perhaps monumental? God did not set Mary up for failure, nor is He setting you up for failure either. God's not looking for your ability; He is looking for your availability. Who are you? You **"are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that [you] should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). "May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfill all your purpose" (Ps. 20:4).**

**Tuesday, November 17** - **"If I say, 'My foot slips,' Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:18-19).** An anxious thought can be harmless enough, but when you dwell on that thought it can quickly turn into worry and eventually worry will turn to fear. That is why Paul told us to **"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"** (2 Cor. 10:5, NIV). So how do you deal with your anxieties? The world offers many alternatives, but I don't think any compare to the Lord's prescription. Some people turn to drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, or food to comfort them. Some of the drugs are legitimate and come via a prescription, but you can't medicate your anxious thoughts away. Nor can you eat, drink, or smoke them away. So what is God's prescription for anxiety? Paul tells us, **"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"** (Phil. 4:6-7, NIV). We don't have to be anxious about anything because God takes requests twenty-four hours a day. You can address that request to Jesus, and He will make sure your Heavenly Father gets it. **"Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you"** (1 Pet. 5:7, NIV). How much of your anxiety does Peter tell us to turn over to the Lord? All of it! Peter tells us don't just set it down politely, but he says to cast it on Him. Webster defines cast as "to throw, fling, or hurl." So why fling it? Because the stuff can become toxic if we hold on to it long enough. If your back is aching because you are carrying a bag of anxious thoughts around all day, the question becomes, why? When your foot slips (and it eventually will), the Lord will hold you up just as He did the psalmist, and His comforts will delight your soul as well. So whatever anxious thought or burden you are carrying around today, cast it on Him because He does care for you.

**Wednesday, November 18** - **"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"** (Ps. 23:1-4, NIV). Sheep are not known for their intelligence. They are totally dependent upon their shepherd to protect them, to guide them to safety, and to direct them to both food and water. David recognized that the Lord protected, guided, and rescued him just as he did for his sheep. Being a shepherd was not without its own risk. David told King Saul, "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear," so he knew all too well the perils that sheep continually faced. As the Lord protected David, so Jesus will protect you. Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"** (John 10:11, NIV). As you know, Jesus did lay down His life for His sheep. Do you need a shepherd today? Do you fear any evil? Peter tells us to **"be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to**

**devour**" (1 Pet. 5:8, NIV). In many ways, fighting an actual lion may be more desirable than dealing with Satan because you can see the lion. Satan, on the other hand, is unseen, cunning, and he doesn't fight fair. Jesus says of Satan, **"the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy"** (John 10:10, NIV). So how does one keep from giving in to fear? First of all, you have to realize the safest place is being next to the Shepherd. The closer you are to the Shepherd, the safer you are. It's when you wander off on your own away from the pack that you are most vulnerable. Don't let the enemy isolate you. There truly is safety in numbers, so you need to surround yourself around a body of believers. You also have to realize that **"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"** (1 John 4:4, NIV). Stick close to the Shepherd and follow His voice. He will lead you away from trouble and in the end, your story can end like David's. **"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"** (Ps. 23:6, NIV).

**Thursday, November 19 - "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall"** (Ps. 27:1-2, NIV). Have you ever had to walk at night in total darkness without a flashlight, no moonlight, and no streetlights? It is not only eerie, but it can be a little dangerous if you cannot see where you are going and are not aware of what obstacles are in front of you. Spiritual darkness is even more intimidating; wandering around having no sense of direction in your life. The Lord does not want you wandering in darkness. He knows it is dangerous, and that is why He left us an eternal light—His word. **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"** (Ps. 119:105, NIV). So next time you find yourself stumbling around in spiritual darkness, reach for the Light. David said the Lord was not only his light, but also his salvation. To have salvation, you have to have a Savior. God sent us a Savior. **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost"** (Luke 19:10, NIV). If you find yourself in a helpless or hopeless situation today, there is help and there is hope, and His name is Jesus. Jesus said, **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"** (John 8:12, NIV). There is a theoretical question out there: does darkness exist? The answer is no. The reason is that darkness, in reality, is the absence of light. You measure darkness by the amount of light present. When Jesus shows up, darkness must flee. You do not have to live life in darkness. **"Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light ... He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness"** (Mic. 7:8-9, NIV). David said, **"He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me"** (Ps. 23:3-4, NIV). When you have a Savior, when you have His word, when you have the Lord, whom shall you fear?

**Friday, November 20 - "While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. 'Your daughter is dead,' they said. 'Why bother the teacher any more?' Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, 'Don't be afraid; just believe'"** (Mark 5:35-36, NIV). The synagogue ruler received a bad report that his daughter had just passed away, and there was no need to bother Jesus anymore. What was Jesus's reaction? He ignored what they said. It doesn't mean the report was false; He just didn't let it impact His plans. He could have told Jairus, "If only you had come to me earlier." But neither time nor distance nor even death are beyond Jesus's pay grade. Jesus has no boundaries! Jesus's friend Lazarus had been dead four days when Jesus raised him from the dead. Just before Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave he told Martha (Lazarus's sister), **"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"** (John 11:40, NIV). For good measure, Jesus also showed us that distance is not relevant either. Then Jesus said to the centurion, **"Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.' And his servant was healed at that very hour"** (Matt. 8:13, NIV). Perhaps you noticed the one common thread that ran through all three passages—the word believe. Do you believe Jesus is bigger than your problem? Have you recently received a bad report? There is the saying, usually used in reference to a sporting event, "It ain't over till the fat lady sings." You need to believe it ain't over till Jesus says it's over. The world is full of bad reports; they are what make the news every night. The good news for us is the Good News. Jesus Christ came to set the captives free. Whatever is holding you captive today, Jesus wants to free you from it. **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"** (Matt. 11:28-30, NIV). Don't be afraid; just believe!

Adapted from: <http://FearNotDevotion.com>