

Daybreak

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The Bus Stop Caper

For every minute you remain angry, you give up sixty seconds of peace of mind.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Throughout the week, the city was experiencing an unusual snap of warm and balmy weather, which was unexpected during the winter season. It was the middle of November, a season when the scenery would treat you with a blanket of snowy, white streets and icy roads. Nonetheless, the city seemed to come alive as the days got longer and brighter. The hustle and bustle of summertime happiness was contagious and spread beyond the city boundaries. People were coming out more. They intended to enjoy the sunny interlude for as long as it lasted.

I was sitting in the perfect spot and observed the panoramic view of the flickering sparks of sunlight that spewed a stream of smoldering, fiery heat across the city. Alone with my thoughts, I reveled in the bright atmosphere that temporarily replaced the gloom in the skies. I was thinking of nothing and everything particularly, my mind flitting from one thought to another like a woman skipping merrily across a wide meadow.

At one time, I wondered, was this a once in a lifetime fluke or a freakish act of Mother Nature? Or was it the product of global warming? I didn't really care if it was. I wanted to be grateful for small miracles. Because, whatever the reason, the sun continued to zoom and zig and zag around the city, leaving behind a trail of smiling, happy faces.

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I observed the overwhelming excitement of the neighborhood kids to get a break from the cold and dreary winter. Their reactions were over the top and could not be contained. So they gathered to play a game of Double Dutch jump rope right at the street corner. Their laughter and screams could be heard from miles away, it seemed. The rowdy bunch even attracted the attention of the local firemen. It was thankfully an uneventful day for them, which meant this part of town was in a completely carefree mood. The firemen were eager to get in on the action and treat the sweaty little rascals to a timeless, old-fashioned version of the fire hydrant drizzle.

As the sprinklers were turned on, the power of rushing water sounded like the downpour of heavy rain, blowing in the wind and flooding the small, dead-end street with enough water to splish and splash, and it was a welcome relief from the heat and humidity of the burning sunlight. The kids ran to get buckets and filled them with the cascading waters. Watching them brought everyone laughter. Everyone started to run for cover when the kids decided to splash the unsuspecting adults with buckets of cool water. As the day wore on, the celebration also continued.

That afternoon, city merchants decided to reduce the price of their most popular goods, and the race was on. The shoppers came out to browse neighborhood stores to get the best deals. As the shoppers ran up and down the aisles and claimed the most-wanted items, they quickly cleared the shelves, in a record-breaking, all-time high.

Well, the city was blissfully contented with the day's adventurous blowout. Everyone, it seemed, was elated with the sunny interlude—kids, teens, and adults alike. For myself, I was content with watching the happy, carefree people around me as I carried on with my day. As I retired for the evening, so did the sun as it disappeared and gave way to the evening shade and officially signal the end of the heat wave in the winter of 1994.

Seemingly, overnight, the frigid winter weather returned with a vengeance. And before the next break of day, the city would be turned

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upside down! The townspeople woke up to an alternate universe, it seemed.

The blistery wind chill was replaced with snappy cold and sprinkled crystal flakes of snow, covering the ground and hood of cars parked on the street. Some people hadn't prepared for such an abrupt change in weather and saw that the icy wind had overturned things that were left to the mercy of the returning winds.

That night, I could hear the cascading sheets of frozen ice balls which sounded like rocks and stones bouncing off the windowpane. So I got out of bed to check for the pieces or shards of broken glass. As I opened the door, a blast of arctic, icy wind sucked the warmth out of the room. Trembling from the bitter, chilly air, I hastily closed the door, secured all the windows, and grabbed a shawl from the closet and hurriedly walked back to my bedroom and got back in bed.

According to the weather forecast, the night of destruction was just getting started and tomorrow for me, was another workday. The city was restless. The menacing howling of the angry wind made going to sleep almost impossible. I briefly imagined that all the winds gathered somewhere, gaining strength and gust just so they could come back fiercer than ever. I lay awake for a couple of minutes, listening and imagining how things looked outside. Nevertheless, as time wore on, I could feel my eyelids slowly closing and sleep was a peaceful blessing.

The disappearance of the morning sunshine seemed to have cast an ominous spell of sadness over the city. And the gray slate texture of the sky was devoid of the bright sun and could offer little hope of revival, after the attack of the storm.

As I looked out of the front window, I was stunned and shocked at the path of destruction to the roof of the apartment carport. The winter storm had dumped pounds of heavy snow on the roof, and it had collapsed under the weight of a blanket of frozen ice. None of the vehicles parked inside could possibly come out undamaged.

My car had escaped the massive wreckage and damage because it was parked in a vacant utility space, away from the carport. That was a small silver lining as I approached my vehicle and saw it nestled in thick snow. Luckily, a good neighbor assisted me, removing the car from the snow-packed embankment with the use of his tow truck and snow shovel. Together, we managed to pull it free from the cold enclosure. But my work was not done yet. The windshields were coated with a thick glaze of ice.

My next order of business was to get inside the car and turn the heater on. While the car was warming up, I got out a can of deicer and sprayed the glass until the ice had melted. I now had a puddle instead of rock-hard ice to scrape off.

The overnight ice storm had paved the street with a shield of gleaming black ice. Driving in any kind of compromised road condition is hazardous and sometimes unpredictable. I pondered how I would drive to work in this precarious condition. Just then, a flashback of my old driver's education instructor was ringing in my head, and I could actually hear the faint whisper of his voice.

“In a black ice situation, take your foot off the gas pedal and slowly glide with the car because it knows what to do.”

His advice was right on target. I chuckled all the way to work, without slipping and sliding. There was quite a build-up on every road. People were cautious. But I got to work intact, with only a slight chill in my bones. I located a side street and parked at the end. I got out of my car and was nearly blown away by the bitter and frigid wind. What a sight it would be if I were knocked off my feet and carried off by a gust of wind. I had better wear heavier clothes next time. In any case, I got my footing back and started toward my workplace.

The road crew had worked through the morning hours to clear the sidewalk of the ice and snow. But the hailstorm continued to pour heavy snowflakes and thick spike icicles which claimed the street and sidewalk.

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The roads were becoming more treacherous and unsafe, so the workers were sent home.

Later, as I was leaving the office building, the cold freezing air of winter made me shiver and the growling rage of the blowing wind slapped me in the face as I walked to my car. I pulled my coat closer to prevent the icy snowflakes from piling on my neck and inside my coat. Good thing my wraparound scarf was warm and cozy against the afternoon chill. The cold, miserable weather made me miss the blistering sun that had shown down on us just two days ago!

I proceeded with caution, by stepping in the frozen footprints molded from the layers of snow to avoid slipping on the ice-packed sidewalk. As I crossed the street, I got a feeling that I was being watched. It was alarming and aroused my suspicion. The hairs on the back of my neck stood with fear and anxiety. It was as if the iciness in the air was surpassed by an overwhelming fear.

I quickly scanned the area, looking for any indication of danger. There was no one in sight. Then my gaze fell on a glimpse of a man, sitting on the bench at the bus stop. Seeing him set me on edge. He was sitting by himself. I couldn't make out his expression or if he was truly looking at me. But the mere sight of him unnerved me. At first glance, the man appeared to be unaware that I was in the vicinity of the bus stop, so I felt confident that I was safe for the moment.

I got in my car and, locking all four doors, started the engine. It was bitterly cold, and the windows crackled with hard frost and was blurred from the chilly air. I waited for the heat to permeate my freezing skin and warm the car enough. Eventually, the steamy heat cleared the windows, and I could see out. The man was still waiting at the bus stop. A few minutes had passed as I got my bearings. I was about to leave when I took one last glance at the bus stop. The man was nowhere to be seen and I assumed he had gotten on a bus.

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But a nagging thought plagued my mind. It was overwhelming. I did not hear or see any bus pull up in the designated spot. Usually, the roaring and screeching of the city bus was deafening to the ears and it can be heard before it is seen.

I leaned slightly forward to check the snow for tire tracks. I found none. I couldn't explain it, but there was just this nagging feeling that I had. My instincts were willing me to be on high alert, urging me to look closely.

The alarming feeling of uneasiness would not go away even as I turned the engine. So I took a quick look at the driver's sideview mirror, and to my astonishment, the man at the bus stop was crouched low, and pulling on the door handle and wielding a sharp object. It was like a crowbar but not exactly. He did not even know that I had spotted him. But it was pretty clear now that he had been watching me earlier. He knew that I was inside the vehicle. Soon, he turned his head toward the mirror and we locked eyes. The look he gave me was chillier than any winter that I experienced in my life. It was terrifying!

I needed to act quickly as he seemed determined to get inside the vehicle. It was quiet and deserted, which made my resolve to get away stronger. Switching the gears, I drove away and left the man on the frozen ground. He had dropped the object he held, yet he seemed undaunted by my sudden departure. From the rearview mirror, I saw him stand and walk back to the bench, no doubt waiting for another car to break into.

I was driving further and further from the scene. Anger was forming in my thoughts and becoming the fuel that was feeding my desire to go back and run him over. My anxiety and fear were slowly being replaced with rage, an overwhelming conviction that he should not be allowed to let someone else feel that way. I kept thinking about who else might park there—someone defenseless is all he needs and he would pounce! With that thought, I made a sharp U-turn.

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I started back down the road with every intention of teaching that man a lesson that he would not soon forget. As I got nearer, my anger ebbed, and a voice called out to my spirit. *Stop!* I heard the voice so clearly that I automatically obeyed. I was in the middle of the road, a short distance from the bus stop. It was extraordinary. The Lord spoke to me, telling me not to act on the anger of the moment. Another feeling swept over me. It was indescribable and made me certain that the Lord was with me. I instantly felt calmer.

I thanked the Lord for clearing my mind. I pulled over and took a deep breath, pondering the extent of my actions in the moment and how the Lord had prevented me from putting myself in a situation I would not be able to get out of. And with that, I turned the car around once again and drove home. As I was driving, I could not resist looking back through my rearview mirror. The bus stop was barely visible at this point. But I had clearly seen that the man had already left the scene.

Occasionally, I still ponder what may have happened that day. If I had let my anger dominate me and gone after that man, where would that have left me? I may have truly pursued him and run him over, thinking my actions were justified. I may have put myself in more danger if he had been there and armed. So many scenarios can happen when we make decisions borne of anger and rage. Instead, here I am, sitting and writing out a possible nightmare.

We are not always in control of the situations we're in. But we can control how we react in these situations. When someone does us wrong, we can lash out and react with anger or we can take a moment and listen to the voice of the Lord, whispering to us.

To me, this was a series of unexpected and unexplained scenarios. It began with the bout of sunny days that everyone welcomed. But our seasons change, and they can change overnight. I certainly did not foresee that the snow would fall so quickly or that the carport would collapse

or that I would encounter someone who would try to break into my car with me inside. We cannot control these events, but we can take control over our emotions. In worse situations, we can choose to be the better person. Listen to the Lord's voice and drive away from your anger.

The Trash Can Brawler

I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.

—Mother Teresa

As I was leaving my apartment, I was greeted with a breath of fresh air. The lingering perfume of wildflowers tickled my nose as the warm embrace of the radiant sunshine lifted my spirit. It was a beautiful day!

I tilted my head and lowered my sunglasses to take a peek at the vibrant display of rainbow colors glimmering in unison and painting the sky. The array of nature's handiwork gave me hope for a day of great expectation. So, with a bounce in my step, I started walking. The streets were desolate—empty of cars and people. This was not unusual for a Saturday morning. Most people had a lazy start to the day and would only come out later—for brunch with friends, a leisurely stroll in the parks, or perhaps an afternoon in the shops. As of right now, the silence that surrounded me was a welcome sound that made me more relaxed. It brought more contentment to the atmosphere. The stillness was usually camouflaged and consumed by sounds of everyday city living but not today.

In some areas, the city was doing some major repairs on damaged sidewalks. They were cracked and sustained deep potholes from years of neglect and heavy usage. Workers littered these streets, even on this quiet Saturday morning. I could still get around, but the challenge for me was to avoid tripping and falling into those dangerous cracks.

I stopped at a street corner and took off my high heels. I retrieved, from my handbag, a pair of tennis shoes which were more comfortable and safer for walking. I would put my heels back on when I reached my office building. In hindsight, this was probably the best decision I had made all day.

My morning was going pretty well, and I had high hopes that today would be a great day! My morning walk, I felt, was going to energize me. My office building wasn't far. I had perhaps been walking for five minutes with happy thoughts pervading me. I was almost halfway to my building when, all of a sudden, the quiet was interrupted and shattered by the unexpected explosion of a loud noise that resonated throughout the area. I was aptly startled by the rapid ricocheting of the vibration which triggered a booming snap, crackle, and popping, like the sound of firecrackers. I stopped in my tracks and tried to look around for the source of the intrusion to my peaceful reverie.

I was already past the roadwork and there wasn't anything I could see that would cause such an imposing noise, and yet it would persist every so often.

The sound was like an explosion that seemed to ripple like metal striking a building nearby, and yet I saw no sign of anyone coming to investigate what was making it. I was suddenly aware that I was walking alone. The feeling of being isolated and uncertain, with no human contact, was frightening. There was no place to hide. So I did the only thing I thought could get me to safety—I kept walking toward my office building and the sound the noise was coming from.

Gradually, the loud and abrasive noise slowly faded and finally ceased. The tranquil serenity of peace was restored momentarily. This made me stop and listen again. But after a few seconds, I continued to walk cautiously. I was unaware that danger was straight ahead and very close to my destination.

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Soon enough, I heard another unexplained disturbance to my calm morning walk. I quickly forgot where I was going when an ear-piercing, banging racket erupted violently. I had reached the halfway mark to my workplace and still could not identify the source of this escalating, explosive noise. Even more baffling was that there was still nobody trying to see what was going on. There was no one peeking out their windows, no sign of authorities walking towards the noise—nothing. It was as though I was the only one who could hear the racket.

I turned a corner and my vision was temporarily obscured by the glaring sunlight. That made it more difficult to locate the origin of the problem and made me more anxious to know exactly what was causing it. Suddenly, the brightness of the sun disappeared and cleared my view. Out of the corner of my eye, the shadow of a young man kicking trash cans caught my attention.

My thoughts were scattered, and I could not comprehend or understand the purpose of his outrageous conduct. I was very close to my building now, and I got even more confused that none of the guards in my building came to investigate the disturbance.

I kept watching the man while I walked as quietly as I could. He was showing no concern for public property or safety. He tossed the lid of a trash can in the air like a frisbee. It was propelled by the wind and floated high and low, and finally crash landed, twisted and bent in the middle of the road. He didn't even stop to consider what he was doing. He kept kicking those trash cans and throwing random things. There was trash all around him. Bent trash cans and lids were overturned, broken electronics were scattered everywhere, and the air was carrying the putrid smell of garbage. Seeing him now made the loud noises make sense. The man was behaving erratically.

Nonetheless, there was something strange and peculiar about this young man that initially escaped my awareness. He was staggering, stumbling, and wildly pummeling his fists in the sky. He was punching

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something invisible. It was as if he had an opponent that only he could see. With closer observation, I instantly recognized the condition from his lack of coordination. He was either high on drugs or coming out of a drunken stupor!

Inch by inch and as quietly as I could manage, I continued walking and keeping a wary eye on him. To my annoyance and horror, the young man became aware of my presence and focused his out-of-control behavior on me. At first, he was just staring. Then he abandoned his raid on the trashcans and started following me. That made me want to run to my building, but I didn't. I tried to keep calm. I held my breath and a strangled gasp that wanted to escape my lips. I didn't want him to see how rattled I was. I focused on where I was going.

I was very close to my workplace, and the young man was not far behind. Then he came to an abrupt halt and pulled from his jacket pocket an unfamiliar but unrecognizable object. From the gleam of the object, I would later believe that it was a knife. But at that moment, I just needed to stay calm and get to my building.

I knew his intent was to harm me. My instinct was to keep walking quietly and quickly away from this stormy and reckless display of untamed violence.

So I prayed out loud over and over again, "Lord, let the guard step out."

Every part of me wanted to run, but I didn't want the man to run after me. So, without delay, I opened my handbag and searched for anything that I could utilize to defend myself. I had forgotten everything else. The flow of adrenaline made me dizzy and nervous, and beads of perspiration speckled my face and crawled along my flesh.

I grasped the first object that I could feel with my hands. The edges were sharp and jagged. It was a jingle of car keys that were dangling at the end of a plastic chain. I took the keys out of my bag and put the largest

one between two of my fingers. I made a fist and braced myself for a fight while I steadily prayed, “Lord, let the guard step out.”

In my head, I was repeatedly uttering, *Don't drop the keys. Don't drop the keys.*

My hand was shaky and sweaty. However, my grip on the keys was strong and determined.

I finally made it to the entrance of my workplace. But at that exact moment, the young man caught up with me, leaped, and lunged at my throat. I also leaped out of the way, trying to put as much distance between us as I could manage. I didn't strike out, but my hand was at the ready to plunge the keys into his eyes and rake the jagged edge across his face and up his nose. I turned around to face him. He was getting ready to come at me again. I could see him bracing himself with a weapon in his hand. My thoughts were going wild! I seemed to be thinking of a million things at once. I was praying and I was telling myself to be ready. Then the man raised his weaponed hand and was about to make a move when suddenly, the guard stepped out and was startled by our appearance. I was breathless, with the anticipation of a possible battle. The man was probably looking wild, getting ready to jump me. The guard was puzzled by our presence, but he took one look at me and said, “Get inside.”

Then he kept his attention on the man. With one hand resting on his side and the other outstretched to signal the man to stop, he appraised the situation.

Without turning my back on the man, I cautiously walked past the guard and entered the building. The young man attempted to follow and was blocked by the guard. Speaking with authority, the guard said, “You, leave or I will call the police.”

By miracle, the man did not struggle. He simply turned around and walked away. He stowed his knife back into his jacket.

After the guard made sure that the man had left the scene, he went to his desk and saw me there in a terrible state.

I was visibly shaken. and I went straight to the guard's desk, sat down, and cried. The guard was trying to calm me down. He asked me some standard questions like which floor did I work on, could he call someone for me, and was I hurt. I heard the rapid questioning, but I couldn't respond. My tears were choking me. It was as if a scream had lodged itself in my throat, but I couldn't talk. I just sat there for about ten minutes, trying to pull myself together.

When I finally got ahold of myself, I asked for some water and to call the police. I recounted my experience to the authorities, and they put an alert out for him. I didn't go to work that day. I couldn't. Those were the worst few minutes of my life and undoubtedly one of the most frightening things I had ever experienced.

I never really understood how much danger I was in or wanted to think about what could have happened. But I am very grateful that the Lord answered my prayer.

An Ordinary Guy

You don't always need a plan. Sometimes you just need to breathe, trust, let go, and see what happens.

—Mandy Hale

People spend most of their adult lives working. Whether you work in an office, a school, hospital, or government building, you will most likely be there for eight hours a day, five days a week. Naturally, you also form connections or friendships in your place of business. I work in an office building, with people coming in and out throughout the day. Frankly, I don't know half the people I smile at each day. I just pass them in the halls, see them in the break room, or happen to take the elevator with them.

If I wanted to make more friends, I would go to the business office. It was generally a pleasant place to mingle with co-workers and engage in small talk before clocking into work. It was also usually where most acquaintances were formed and connections were forged, especially since the work hours can get crazy with the shifting work schedules.

The work schedule consisted of full-time workers who would regularly compete for the coveted day work hours, the half-time evening hours, and the double duty split shift hours. Any of these schedules was better than the dreaded graveyard hours.

Obviously, nobody wanted to work in the middle of the night and mess up their entire sleep cycle. Not to mention the type of business they'd get in that shift. Nothing in that work schedule seemed appealing. Even workers' personal lives got affected by it. They can lose time for their families, themselves, and they clamor for sufficient rest every day!

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Each day of each week was like riding a roller coaster. You're happy and having fun riding high, and sometimes you're anxious for the ride to come to an end. It was one thing to manage your workload, but you never really know who you're going to have to deal with. I have been on this roller coaster time and time again. My dilemmas are usually mental and emotional. I like to keep to myself when I get bad days.

Usually, the workers at our office are extremely overloaded with resolving a long list of issues from a chronic complainer or explaining to a child in friendly, age-appropriate language that the telephone is not a play toy. But the worst issues came from the frustrated customers who would cuss and vent for the entire conversation. These were the customers who blamed workers for things that they mostly had no direct control over and unload negativity unto them through the phone. Added to that, the never-ending challenge to stay focused and deliver excellent customer satisfaction and service can make it difficult to maintain a positive disposition.

However, I always looked forward to working a few hours of overtime, which usually meant extra money for the cookie jar, and was always positively rewarding. Sometimes a busy day of conversing with people from the four corners of the globe was an exciting adventure. Traveling the world at the speed of the sonic boom is a modern-day phenomenon, especially when it is accomplished without having to leave the workstation. It's like a first-class trip with all expenses paid. I just think of it that way to cheer up.

There are days when coping with a grueling workweek can trigger an epidemic of emotional and mental fatigue, which can spread like wildfire. It usually starts when a co-worker gets burnt out. He would start to complain and *influence* people with his mood. It's insane to watch how one person's sentiments can affect the morale of an entire office.

One time, somehow, I managed to get entangled in the throes of a heated dispute and attempted to escape to a quiet place and seek relief for the persistent and throbbing pain that was a raging war in my head.

Looking back, I can't even remember what it was about, how it started, or even who was involved. I just remember instantly recognizing the presence of an old, ancient enemy which is the almighty migraine. In just a short span of time, the pain had jumped the scale—moderate to intolerable—and the wailing of my spirit called out in despair. There is no place like home.

My refuge was just a few miles away, and it was not time to clock out of work. It did not matter how many times I checked my watch. Time seemed to have stood still.

Finally, after an agonizingly slow wait, the workday was over. I eagerly wrapped up my work. Most people at the office were relishing the idea of home and relaxation. But I had errands to complete. I slipped out of my office building and began my afternoon drive to the bank. It was hectic and frustrating as I maneuvered my way through the congested streets and bumper to bumper chaos. But then, I saw a clear lane straight ahead, so I swerved across a vacant lot and parked at the first available meter adjacent the bank.

I was on a mission to stop at the bank and pick up a few items from the shopping center before my daughter got out of school.

Before exiting the car, I took out the bank card, then I hastily shoved my bulky handbag underneath the passenger seat to obstruct the visibility of anyone seeking to ransack anything from inside the car. Anxious to make a transaction, I sprinted up the steps of the bank, only to be confronted with a long line of agitated people, awaiting patiently for access to the ATM machine. There were professionals from different industries in line. People who needed to pick up groceries or rush home to get dinner started—these were the people I ran into every day.

Finally, the line dwindled, and I made a withdrawal. Clutching an envelope filled with money, I dashed back down the steps and hurried to my car. I unlocked the door and got in.

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I flippantly tossed the envelope in the passenger seat and the bills trickled out, scattering across the seat and floor. I turned and gathered the money, but as I was not paying attention to the outside world, I didn't realize that I hadn't locked the car door yet. Then I noticed the sunlight was gradually fading, and the instant thought entered my mind. Did I close and lock the driver's door?

Without delay, I reached for the door handle to close it shut, expecting to hear a click. Instead, the door sprung open. Something was preventing the door from closing. I decided to take a closer look. As I scooted towards the door, I bumped into the steering wheel. And to my astonishment, a man was standing in my personal space, and what separated us was the steering wheel.

Faced with this unexpected intrusion, fear crippled my thoughts, and I was stunned speechless. The man was just standing there, blocking my exit. Even passersby would not be able to see what he was doing to anyone inside the car, which meant that I was trapped.

My words were stuck in my throat and could not get out. My mind was screaming, yet nothing could be articulated. I was stunned silent for what felt like a very long time.

In hindsight, I am still puzzled by how this man got my car open without me hearing or even noticing anything. My ride was a noisy, old clunker. The driver's door would squeak, squeal, and groan when opened. So how could he possibly have caught me off guard. In any case, there was now a man who just stood there and did not say a word.

I observed his demeanor, which was surprisingly calm and relaxed. I think he was observing me as well. His silence was a mystery. As we both took our measures, I was becoming more and more bewildered about how to handle this situation.

Should I scream at the top of my lungs or vehemently yell, get out of my car? Clearly, I did not have a plan.

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Instead, I took a mental note of his appearance. It was unremarkable. He was just an ordinary guy—a white male with a mop of wavy-brown hair, clean shaven, and casually dressed in everyday attire. He could be anyone, really. He could have walked past me and I wouldn't pay him any attention. But he was still unmoving and silent.

The spirit of the Lord was with me as I silently prayed, "Help me speak the right words."

Without hesitating, I asked, "Do you need help?"

He responded "Have you got fifty cents? I'm late for a job interview and I need bus fare."

I breathed a sigh of relief which escaped my lips. I was prepared to hand over the pile of money that was just hanging out in the passenger seat. Although his request was unbelievable, I was happy to oblige. As I reached for my handbag, I remembered it was hidden under the passenger seat. My temporary relief was replaced by anxiousness once again. My decision to hide the handbag put me in a dilemma. I did not want to turn away from him to retrieve the handbag. I mentally debated my options and decided that I didn't have any in this situation.

The only solution was to trust the person and get the bag. Leaning over the seat padding, I quickly stretched my left arm until my hand clutched the bag, yanking it free of the tracks on the floor. Unzipping the handbag, I took out fifty cents and placed the change in his hand. He said nothing when I gave him the change. I wasn't sure if he'd wanted to say anything else. So I lowered my head and prayed his interview would be a success.

I may have been murmuring or praying out loud with my car door wide open and a man standing there, but I just needed to seek the Lord in this uncertain situation. When I raised my head, he had vanished. I couldn't see if he was walking down the street or waiting for a bus on the corner. It was as if he was gone in the blink of an eye.

I had forgotten all the errands I needed to do that day. I was just very grateful that the man was not who I thought he was, and I did think of the worst possible things. I closed the door, put the pedal to the metal, and got the heck out.

Anxiety and Me

Your day may not have gone so well but remember that today may just be today. At daybreak, it is a whole new story. So hold on and then do better.

Anxiety is an emotion. It's normal. Everybody gets anxious now and then. It may be because of a difficult problem or school test, a big, life-altering decision, or even just seeing something you're scared of. Even the occurrences that I've described in my three short stories can be perceived by others as someone who is justifiably anxious. But others will see it as if looking at a mirror and reliving an occurrence that has overwhelmed them.

I am not a doctor, but I am speaking from a place of experience and empathy. Each time I describe the experiences that gave me anxiety, I relive them too. But they don't cripple me. Not anymore. I have healed from them because of my faith. And you can too.

Anxiety starts to become a problem when it disables you—gives you a physical, mental, or emotional reaction. When the anxiety becomes a constant visitor and develops into raw and genuine fear for something or even nothing in particular, it becomes an illness. Most people who experience crippling anxiety get diagnosed with one of many disorders and undergo treatment.

I used to get a sharp, terrible pain in my head when I had anxiety. I would also sweat profusely. I was stressed about the thing that made me anxious. And I was stressed that I was becoming anxious. The smallest changes in my plans or slightest deviation in my path worried me and

consumed me. It was something that I overcame with a lot of work, but I didn't work alone. I had an amazing support system. I prayed and spoke with God. That's what I'd tell you to do too.

Anxiety, emotional and mental trauma, and stress are heavy burdens to carry. They almost consume and incapacitate you. But you are not your trauma nor are controlled by it. Believe that you can get past them and give yourself the gift of healing. It is great to seek therapy and have the support of your loved ones. As with any problem we face, we need to acknowledge that there is a problem, and we actively seek counsel. There are numerous books you can read about it, experts that you can consult, and people you can lean on. You either have a tight, close-knit social group or a lot of people rooting for you, but it is very important to remember that you are not alone. Most importantly, always remember that you can always seek the counsel of the Lord. He is the best therapist because he listens to everything you need to tell him and his advice never fails. He will never break your confidence.

My stories of uncontrollable situations, even uncontrollable weather at one time, is not an isolated experience. Although my reactions, thoughts, and circumstances may be different, I know that I am not the only person feeling this way. So another way for me to cope is to reach out to people who can relate. And if you do, take comfort too. We are in this together.

May you someday be able to write about your experiences or share them to inspire. The Lord is with us now and always.

