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Nothing I Suffer Surprises God



Article by [Vaneetha Rendall Risner](#) 

Regular Contributor

How will this turn out? How hard will it be? How long is this trial going to last?

Those questions are often at the core of my worries. I want reassurance that this problem is a temporary blip. That my deepest worries are unfounded. That what's happening right now is going to turn out well.

A few mornings ago, I was concerned about an unexplained new health issue, uncertain of what the underlying problem might be. This on top of the deep and chronic pain I already carry because of my post-polio. The new issue had been bothering me for weeks and was still unresolved. There were so many unknowns. I was sitting before an open Bible, reading God's words in Scripture, but my mind was somewhere far away.

I grabbed my phone and put my questions into Google. I searched and searched, using different terms and queries, to figure out what my symptoms indicated. I wondered whether I should be concerned. I wanted

assurance that I was going to be okay. I found a few hopeful answers but still felt vaguely unsettled. I went back to reading my Bible, wishing I hadn't interrupted my time with God for that.

Information Is Not the Answer

Then I read, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way" ([Psalm 46:1-2](#)). I realized how foolish I'd been. Why was I looking elsewhere first for answers? Why did I think that my problem was a lack of information? Why did I want reassurance from Google rather than from God?

I'm not alone in looking to the Internet for answers. Some statistics estimate 5.5 billion searches are initiated each day, which would mean 63,000 per second. Everyone wants information, as if information were the solution to all our problems.

With Psalm 46 in my ears, I started journaling, reminding myself of the truth that I often write about and so desperately want to live. Whatever comes to pass has been determined by God ([Isaiah 37:26](#)). God calls into existence the things that do not exist ([Romans 4:17](#)). Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's will ([Matthew 10:29](#)). Nothing is too hard for him ([Jeremiah 32:17](#)).

God Knows About the Boats

Instinctively I wrote, "God knows all about the boats."

I first read that phrase in Elisabeth Elliot's book *Be Still My Soul*, in which she tells of Amy Carmichael's experience. Amy, a young missionary in Japan at the time, was traveling with an older missionary couple when they were delayed by a boat that never came. They waited days for the next boat, and Amy worried about the lost time and inconvenience to others, to which the older missionary calmly responded, "God knows all about the boats."

"God knows all about the boats" became a lifelong maxim to Amy, and now to me, reminding us that God is in control and knows every detail of what is happening. Even when we are waiting for answers, we need not worry.

What Good Can God Do?

As I sat there, praying, I confessed how often I don't even bring God into my worries.

I may mouth a quick prayer, but practically I act as though everything depends on my wisdom. And I instinctively assume that wisdom comes from information. But when I remember that God makes foolish the wisdom of the world ([1 Corinthians 1:20](#)), and that the foolishness of God is wiser than men ([1 Corinthians 1:25](#)), I realize that more information won't really help me, at least not in the ways I need most.

I can stop frantically trying to reassure myself that I'll be fine, and that things will turn out for the best. Indeed, we who are in Christ are guaranteed that everything in our lives will turn out for the best; one day

we will be grateful even for what we mourn on earth now. We are assured that God will never withhold his best from us.

I am not implying I shouldn't research within reason or try to understand the perplexing realities that are happening to me or around me. There may be steps that I need to take. But regardless, I need to invite God into the process, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And I don't need to panic with the unexpected. Nothing that's happening to me is a surprise to God.

Trading 'What If' for 'Even If'

The one whom I was talking to at the outset, the God of the universe, whose very words are written on the pages of Scripture, is the only one who can change my situation and change me in it. It is his wisdom and comfort I need, not man's collective knowledge through the Internet.

Years ago, [I wrote an article](#) to remind myself (and others) that even if my nightmares came true, God would be there, carrying me and comforting me. When we are obsessively searching Google, we are often wondering what we'll do if the worst happens, or we're trying to reassure ourselves that the worst won't happen. We are hoping to calm our fears by others' collective knowledge, more data, some scrap of information that will put our minds to rest.

The truth is, the worst might happen to any of us.

Trusting God means believing that *even if* the worst happens, God will be sufficient. Replacing "what if" with "even if" is one of the most liberating exchanges we can make. We trade our irrational fears of an uncertain future for the loving assurance of an unchanging God.

Even If the Worst Happens

As I write, the coronavirus is spreading, causing great fear, leaving many wondering how many deaths this pandemic might cause. It may be legions. Or it may not be as deadly or dangerous as predicted. But even if the worst happens, God will be there.

He who keeps us will not slumber. He is our keeper, and he alone keeps our life ([Psalm 121:3, 5, 7](#)).

Regardless of what happens — even if there are no sheep in the fields and no cattle in the stalls — we can still rejoice in the God of our salvation ([Habakkuk 3:17–18](#)).

So, the next time I'm worried about something, turning it over in my mind as I go through the day and even when I lie awake at night, I pray that I will not keep turning to the world for reassurance. I pray that I will remember that he who tells the ocean's waves how far they can go ([Job 38:11](#)) has the situation perfectly under control. I pray that I will not fear what is happening, will not turn to Google over God, and will rest knowing that even if the worst happens, even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God will be there with me ([Psalm 23:4](#)).