

Hey, God!
What Now?
Biblical Assurance for Life's Questions

saint mary's press



edited by Laurie Delgatto

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Laurie Delgatto

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FOREWORD

foreword

Looking back, I would describe my teenage years as typical. School, after-school activities, and sports practices took up the majority of my time. Every evening at dinner my parents, siblings, and I would take turns sharing the events that occurred in our lives that day. Then it was upstairs to finish homework and to get ready for bed, only to wake up the next morning and begin the same routine again.

The time I spent with friends broke up the monotony of my daily grind. In junior high we played Capture the Flag and rode bikes around our neighborhood. We were carefree and had little responsibility other than homework and our household chores. God was a constant in my life, but I found myself turning to God only when I was thankful for something—a good grade on a math test or a great catch in the final inning of my softball game.

High school brought major changes in my life, both personally and spiritually. Besides more challenging classes and increased hours of homework, I was suddenly faced with more responsibility than I had ever had before. Along with the pressures of maintaining good grades in school, more competitive sports teams, and the opinions of my peers came difficult decisions I had to make for myself. My parents were supportive and always willing to listen and to give advice, but I knew I

was old enough to begin to trust my own judgment.

These moments of judgment suddenly became a predominant part of my life. My friends and I were no longer interested in playing Capture the Flag or riding bikes. We were focused on whom we were going to the prom with or which party we would attend on Saturday night. On the heels of these choices were more difficult ones—*What if my date to the prom wants to go further physically than I am comfortable with? What if people are drinking at the party this weekend?*

As I began to pay closer attention to the decisions I was forced to make each and every day, I realized I could find the answers—not in a textbook or by asking classmates or family members—but by turning to my Catholic faith and the word of God. More and more, I found myself turning to God and the Bible not only as an afterthought when something good had happened, but to help me make difficult decisions that were in tune with my Catholic faith.

With every occasion requiring a decision that came up, I took time to ask myself what I thought Jesus would do if he were faced with the same task. *Should I skip class with my friends? Should I cheat on my history exam?* The right decision for me, even if it was not what my friends were doing, was usually clear after this process. Not only did thinking about this help me make wise decisions, but it also improved my friendship with God. By imagining Jesus in today's world—as a teenager facing the same struggles—I was able to try my best to do what he would have done in that same

situation. I soon realized that the lessons God teaches us in the Scriptures transcend time. No matter what new technology is created or how inventions have changed the way society operates, the Bible will always be relevant and provide guidance to those who have faith.

Of course no one can perfectly emulate Christ. At some point, even the strongest person will give in to peer pressure or make a decision he or she may later regret. I knew this and made my fair share of poor choices. But, ultimately, the decision I made to try my hardest to live as Christ would have lived in today's world helped me through some difficult times.

I have since left my years as a teenager behind, but the responsibilities I have been given and the decisions I am forced to make remain. Peer pressure still exists and I still make mistakes. But I continue to rely on the teachings of Christ for support in my times of need. The lessons I have learned from Scripture in high school continue to help me reaffirm the difficult decisions I face every day. As a teacher and a friend, God has helped me through college, the death of people close to me, and the many celebrations in my life. By incorporating God's word into my daily life, I know I am doing the best I can to live as a young Catholic.

Karaline E. Jackson

INTRODUCTION

introduction

Your word is a lamp to my feet,
and a light to my path

Psalm 119:105

Self-image. Forgiveness. Relationships. These are the issues we deal with in our day-to-day lives. And we are bombarded with messages about how to respond to them. But what does God have to say about how we should face these challenges? And how is God with us in each moment of our day? The Scriptures assure us that God wants to meet every need we have, and the topical reflections in this book enable you to reflect upon God's assurances, to believe them, to receive them, and to pray them. In the pages of this book, you will discover that the Bible has something to say to you about the real issues you face as a teenager.

Hey, God! What Now? Biblical Assurance for Life's Questions contains passages from the Scriptures on forty-plus topics, covering a broad range of areas in which all of us struggle to know what to think, what to say, what to do, what to be. These reflections also offer a Catholic response to what the Scriptures say to you about issues that matter in your life.

In addition to thought-provoking Catholic commentaries, *Hey, God! What Now?* includes a collection of reflections and prayers written by young people. The writings cover the gamut of

issues that confront young people today—from thoughts of suicide to family relationships, from remarriage of a parent to trust and hope in God. *Hey God! What Now?* makes it easy to discover the Bible's wisdom about a variety of issues and helps you reflect on your situation in everyday language you can easily understand. You will also find suggestions you can apply to your life. The contributors write of personal issues and concerns you will recognize, showing how they turn to God in times of need and in times of celebration and praise. From the experiences of young people like yourself, you will read about struggles that may be part of your own life. You will be given questions and suggestions that challenge you to move into a greater awareness of your life and faith, and you will be able to pray with young people whose hearts have been touched by God.

Hey, God! What Now? is a great companion in your study of the Scriptures, because it is a personal guide to a life of faith. It is also an open door to a spiritual adventure that knows no limitation as you apply its approach to your daily life. I invite you to walk through that open door and discover all that God has in store for you by studying, believing, receiving, praying, and living the word of God. It will change your life as it has changed the lives of the young people whose stories you will find in these pages.

I challenge you to turn to the Scriptures regularly, open them prayerfully, read them expectantly, and live them joyfully.

Laurie Delgatto, editor

ABUSE

Scripture Passage

And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

Genesis 21:17–21

Study It!

Seemingly facing certain death, Hagar receives from God the ability to see the opportunity for life in front of her. The writer of Genesis makes the point that God rescues the abused and abandoned. Hagar and Ishmael survive, and from their descendants, a great people emerge.

Hagar’s story reminds us that God wants to rescue us from oppression, injustice, and abuse. Often, we want to ask God to magically take

these things away. But because God has given human beings free will, we cannot always be spared from the abuse and injustice of others. In your prayer, you can always ask God to rescue you, to give you the vision to see the healthy choices you can make to improve your situation.

Live It!

Abuse is about being forced into a destructive relationship, one that breaks your heart. A negative relationship can take many forms. A friendship where the other is cruel and demeaning, making you feel less worthy every day, is an example. It could be a boyfriend or a girlfriend who demands all your time and doesn't allow you to grow individually and in Jesus. When we are involved in a relationship that we can't get out of or see no solution to, that is when we should turn it completely over to God. We should ask God to give us the knowledge to know what to do and the strength to follow through.

I have lived a life that I am very reserved to talk about. What happened isn't the point, but how I overcame it is what matters. I have learned there is something bigger than the pain and hurt: God. When it seemed that everyone was gone, that no one acknowledged me, Jesus did. I never once failed to see the beauty in life, even through a black eye.

Pray It!

Lord, please rescue me from myself,
From the decisions that I can, cannot, should,
or should not make.

So many are suffering and hurting,

Lord, help me help them.

Give me the knowledge to know what to do,

And give me the strength to follow through.

Never once, not for one moment, let me forget
that you died on the cross for me.

Lord, give us your strength. You were beaten,
deceived, betrayed, and hurt, but you did
God's will.

Lead us also to do your will.

*Reflection and prayer
by Angela Nicola*

What Now?

- What are some ways you can help those who have been abused?
- What are some steps you can take when you suspect someone is being abused? You may want to seek out trusted adults, including lawyers, social workers, school counselors, your pastor, your youth minister, your teacher, and so on, and ask them to help you create this list.
- Wear a blue ribbon to show your commitment to preventing abuse and neglect.

- If you are in an abusive or unjust situation, ask God to rescue you and to give you the vision to see the healthy choices you can make to improve your situation.
- For more perspective on *abuse*, read Genesis 16:1–16, Proverbs 3:31, Psalms 91:1–6, and Colossians 3:19.

ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR

Scripture Passage

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immortality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:6–14

Study It!

How do you spend the bulk of your free time? talking with your friends on the phone? playing video games? listening to your favorite music? If you discover that you have become obsessed with that activity, maybe it has become addictive. Even if your obsession is not a true addiction—like those caused by drugs, alcohol, gambling, or eating disorders—it still might have more control over your life than it should have.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they should put God at the center of their life. He points out that they will always be tempted to replace God with something else—which is called idolatry—as the ancient Israelites were tempted.

How about us today? We may not worship foreign gods or eat meat sacrificed to idols. But in many ways, our addictive behaviors are like idolatry. They consume our thoughts and time and can even lead us away from God.

Live It!

I am one of those people who just can't say no. Someone will ask me to do something for him or her, and I know I don't have time, but I will say yes anyway. I find myself way too involved and busy. From the moment I wake up in the morning to the moment I fall asleep at night, I am doing some sort of activity, whether it is facilitating a National Honor Society meeting, or swimming with my

high school swim team. These activities often consume all my time and energy, taking away the things that are most valuable to me. My grades have gone down. I don't spend much time with my family, and most important, my relationship with God has suffered due to my entanglement with other things.

I realize the problem with this somewhat addictive behavior and pray that God will help me overcome it. I need to offer up my troubles to God and let God know that I do need help. It is important to set aside ample time for prayer and reflection.

Pray It!

Lord,

Please give me the courage to undertake only
what I can handle.

Help me to realize what is most important in
my life, and that, without you, life is
meaningless and difficult.

I offer up to you, on this day, my heart, my soul,
and my mind.

Take me by the hand and help me to get through
each day, one at a time.

Thank you for everything you do.

Amen.

*Reflection and prayer
by Veronica L. Bridges*

What Now?

- How are you making prayer a priority in your life?
 - Has something become so addictive that it is hurting your relationship with God? How can you change your addiction?
 - Set aside a few minutes each day. Dedicate those few minutes to God.
 - Addictive behaviors are hard to break. And true addictions are very difficult to control. If you think you have an addiction, talk to a parent, school counselor, or minister.
- For more perspective on *addictive behavior*, read Proverbs 25:28, Luke 12:13–21, Galatians 5:1–2, and Peter 1:4–9.

ALCOHOL

Scripture Passage

Try to find out what is pleasing to the LORD. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says:

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the LORD is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:10–19

Study It!

This passage encourages the early Christians to wake up and find out what pleases God. It calls them and us to avoid participating in things

that we would be ashamed of if they were exposed in the light. Its tone does not scold but passionately encourages, wanting the best for each of us.

The abuse of alcohol is singled out in this passage as something Christians should avoid. Drinking is an issue virtually everyone confronts during adolescence. The author of Ephesians is not saying that wine is evil in itself, but that getting drunk prevents us from being filled with the Spirit.

Live It!

Most of us want to avoid sin if at all possible. But when we drink, we have little control over our actions, so we could easily be led into sin. With this lack of control, we could do all sorts of things that we would regret later, like hurting someone physically or having sex. Being led to sin like this is basically the same as being led away from God. I don't understand why people would choose to be led away from God. Even if drinking didn't lead us to sin, there are still other consequences. I know a lot of people whose athletic and academic careers were ruined because they were caught drinking and were suspended from their teams, clubs, or even school. How good does that look on college, scholarship, or job applications? It's just not worth it. A high for a little while can't make up for messing up my life. God has a plan for me, for all of us, and if I go mess that up, then I'm not only letting myself down, but I'm letting God down too. So basically, for me, it all comes down to the fact that

if I want to be the person who, I know deep down, God wants me to be, then I can't let anything get in the way of it.

Pray It!

Lord, give me the strength to stand up to temptations.

Help me to keep the big picture in mind and not give in to instant gratification. Let my decisions stand strong and be respected, and guard me from people who try to lead me down the wrong path.

*Reflection and prayer
by Sarah Nenninger*

What Now?

- Making wise choices about alcohol is important. What temptations do you face in this regard?
 - What choices do you need to make to please God and to enjoy the fullness of life in the Spirit?
 - Write and then sign a covenant stating that you will choose life in the Spirit rather than the temptation and the peer pressure to drink.
- ☐ For more perspective on *alcohol*, read Proverbs 20:11, Proverbs 31:6, Sirach 31:25–31, and Romans 14:21.

ANXIETY

anxiety

Scripture Passage

He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life. What you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying.”

Luke 12:22–29

Study It!

Doesn't it seem a little naive to assume that if we just trust God, we will get what we need; that we shouldn't worry about the everyday things like clothing, food, and shelter? Seems pretty risky and yet . . .

Lakeesha and Miguel were best friends. Miguel had a big problem. He worried all the time. He sometimes made himself sick with worrying. He worried that his parents would lose their jobs. He worried that he wouldn't find a job. He worried about doing poorly in school. When it was stormy out, he worried about tornadoes. He drove his friends crazy with his worrying.

Lakeesha, on the other hand, never worried. One day, Miguel asked her for her secret to staying calm. She told him: "Miguel, if you keep focused on the negative things that could happen and worry about them, you will not see all the good things happening around you. Did you know that your mom just got a raise? You didn't notice that our band teacher said you had the best fingering technique he had seen. And I bet you didn't look at the want ads for new summer jobs. Right? You spend too much time worrying and not enough time noticing."

Jesus says the same thing. Don't worry so much about everyday needs. Look for the simple signs that God cares for you. Some people keep a journal of the good things that happen to them every day. Life will be so much calmer and less stressful if you heed Jesus' message.

Live It!

School: Studying for tests, completing papers and projects, six hours of homework a night. How will I ever meet my deadlines and keep my grades up?

Band: Evening practice, football games, wind symphony, private lessons, orchestra. How can I excel musically if I have so many obligations and no time to practice?

Work: Six Flags, Rockne's, money, no time on the weekends for homework. I can't pay for college or go to Spain if I don't work, but my grades suffer and I lose sleep because I do. Should I keep a job during the school year? Should I switch jobs?

Social life: Fun, family, friends, boyfriend. How can I maintain any relationship if I have no time to spend with loved ones? When do I get time to relax?

My relationship with God: Do I have one?

As my life begins to spiral out of control and my head begins to fill with worries, I forget about God. There's no time for church or prayer. Loneliness, migraines, stomach pains, and tears plague me every day, making it hard to get up in the morning. But God will provide. God feeds the ravens, who do no work, and assures us that we are more important than the birds. I will only be able to live life to the fullest if I stop worrying and instead place all my anxieties in God's hands and let him work his plan.

Pray It!

Lord God,

Thank you for all you do for me.

I am truly sorry for all the times I forget you are there.

Help me not to lose sight of my faith among my many worries.

Help me to realize I am not alone.

Give me the courage to ask for help and the peace of mind to place my problems in your hands and let your will be done.

*Reflection and prayer
by Elizabeth Ohneck*

What Now?

- What are your greatest anxieties?
 - What are some of the good things that have happened to you today?
 - Don't worry about the little things, simply work on them one at a time. For the bigger problems, make a plan to overcome the obstacle in small steps, and ask God for help along the way. Some things you can't change. Place these worries in God's hands.
- For more perspective on *anxiety*, read Psalm 55:22, Ecclesiastes 11:7–10, Philippians 4:6–7, and 1 Peter 5:6–7.

BETRAYAL

betrayal

Scripture Passage

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” At that moment the cock crowed for a second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Mark 14:66–72

Study It!

Imagine that you are facing a difficult time. Your best friend promises to be with you no matter what. This is the one person you rely on, who has been there for you and has been the most loyal and faithful of all your friends. You have spent the last three years together . . . working, studying, enjoying holidays, traveling, and sharing countless meals and discussions. Now, imagine that this friend completely lets you down.

Peter was one of Jesus' best friends. As the story is told in the Gospel of Mark, the relationship has its difficult times, but Jesus continuously tries to reach Peter. Knowing Peter is going to deny him, Jesus even tries warning Peter that things would happen this way.

Probably just like some of your friends, Peter had good intentions but could not follow through with his assurances to Jesus. But Jesus did not give up on Peter, and Peter became one of the greatest heroes of our church. Don't give up on your friends either.

Live It!

Everything was going great—hanging out every day, learning from each other, and most of all laughing together. Sarah and I were best friends in my junior year of high school. One of the most rewarding summers I ever had came from our friendship. Of course we had our problems—

an occasional fight or a petty argument—but we got over them quickly. Sometimes we even became closer because of it.

Soon after the first week of senior year started, Sarah came to me with exciting but threatening news. She was going out with Jesse. He was perfect for her, I knew, but I couldn't push back that empty feeling I had at the bottom of my stomach. With school, her job, and now Jesse, Sarah had a lot less time for me.

About a month later, during my soccer season, I tore my ACL and had to have surgery. I was scared, and when I really needed someone there for me, she was busy with her own life. In many ways I felt betrayed.

I told her I was jealous and I missed spending time with her. From then on we became as close as we were before and I didn't mind sharing her with Jesse, because I knew deep down that she wouldn't forget our friendship and our great summer together. Now when I get to hang out with her, I don't take it for granted. I know that if I hadn't taken the time to tell her how I was feeling, then maybe I would have given up on our friendship altogether, which would have been the worst decision of my life.

Pray It!

Lord, give me the patience to never give up on my friends, even if the times are at their worst. Lord, give me the strength to talk to my friends when

there is a problem or I am hurting so that through our communication we will work through the difficult times.

Lord, thank you for the gift of the many friendships I have, big or small.

*Reflection and prayer
by Sarah Kneller*

What Now?

- What are the times when you leave (or have left) friends standing alone when your life becomes filled with your own course of action?
 - Do you forget or are you too scared to talk to your friends when there are problems? How do you keep them to yourself?
 - Seek out someone who has betrayed you and offer forgiveness.
- For more perspective on *betrayal*, read Deuteronomy 4:31, Judges 16:4–22, Psalm 55, and 1 Peter 5:7.