

# SAFE ALL ALONG

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Trading Our Fears and Anxieties  
for God's Unshakable Peace

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## Katie Davis Majors

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Kisses from Katie*

# SAFE ALL ALONG

Trading Our Fears and Anxieties  
for God's Unshakable Peace

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SAFE ALL ALONG

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*To Benji. There is no one I would rather walk  
with through the waves of this life.  
Thank you for always pointing me  
back to the Father.*



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## THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.

—ISAIAH 43:2

Our family stood on the banks of the Nile River, one of our favorite places to be, relax, and adventure. The rush of the rapids, the breeze off the water, the laughter, and an occasional shriek from one of our children carried up the riverbank, and I stood in awe, deeply grateful for all that God had carried us through over the past two years to bring us to this spot.

My husband, Benji, and I had sent seven children to college on a different continent, where they were navigating new cultures and foreign lifestyles, with an ocean and eight or nine hours of time difference between us. We had added another baby to our crew, which now totaled fifteen children, teens, and young adults. We had faced more than one medical emergency that left every member of our family reeling and had us traveling back and forth all over the place and spending more time apart than together. Like many other people, we had endured nine months of our country being fully locked down due to a global pandemic. And really, these are only a few of the things that were going on, added to the daily grind of just being



humans trying to love each other and our neighbors well, trying to navigate online schooling and Zoom meetings and how to get groceries while not being allowed to drive a car due to pandemic restrictions in Uganda.

And now, for the first time in more than a year, we were together.

Needless to say, a family camping trip along our favorite river, at a section we'd never explored before, seemed like a needed reprieve. As our children get older and venture out into all corners of the world, I am keenly aware that our times of all being in one place are increasingly rare, and I purposed to soak up every minute. We were ready for adventure.

Almost all our family members are strong swimmers and decent kayakers, so even in new places along the river, I don't usually worry too much. On this day, standing with our kids at the edge of the little bay, the current looked strong, no doubt, but it also looked somewhat circular, as though you could get in and swim or float a bit and it would circle around and spit you back out near the shore. This is what we were banking on anyway. The thing about rivers is that you can't possibly tell how strong the current is until you're in it.

Ignoring the sign warning even strong swimmers *not to swim there*, Benji and one of our teenage daughters strapped on life jackets and jumped into the water. The current did exactly what we thought it would. They swam around and then let the circular tide bring them right back in to where the rest of us were standing. *Looks easy enough*, I thought, and I convinced our daughter to go again with me.

Another thing about rivers: They aren't exactly predictable. About halfway around the bend, the water shifted. Just thirty seconds later, we found ourselves fighting the current, swimming with all our strength toward the shore but instead being pushed farther away.

I called to our daughter, "Are you okay? Keep swimming!"

And she would answer, "Yeah, I'm okay!" with her head barely

bobbing above the snow-white foam.

But I was beginning to feel desperate to get out of the water, and to get her out with me. I could hear Benji's voice in my head remarking that if we were to get caught up in the current (which, of course, we were sure that we would *not*), the tree sticking out from the shore at the edge of the bay would be our last chance to get out and we wouldn't want to let the current take us much farther due to the falls a little ways up the river.<sup>1</sup> I know. As I type this story out, the whole thing really doesn't sound like a good idea. But we are kind of an audacious group.

From my view in the water, the "last chance" tree was getting rapidly closer. And as it did, my panic rose. Everything in me swam for that tree. I kept calling out to my daughter (probably more to reassure myself), who was farther out in the water than I was, "It's going to be okay! You can do it. Swim hard!" I craned my neck to see her as I swam with all my might. We were going to make it. As I reached my right hand out toward her, I used my other one to grab for an overhanging branch.

The limb snapped off in my hand.

I felt like I was watching myself in some kind of movie scene, willing myself to make it to the shore and somehow get my daughter there with me. The current crashed my legs against jagged rocks, still pulling my body fast, away from the bank I was reaching for, and still pulling my baby fast and away from my outstretched arm.

As I finally grabbed hold of another branch, I turned to reach for my daughter. But she was too far away, her arms outstretched, her head barely visible over the white foam of the rapids. I thought I heard her call for me as she was swept around the corner, out of my view, into the vast swirling water.

I know what you are thinking: *a mother's worst nightmare*. And it was. Had this been a scene from a movie, I couldn't have scripted it to be more intense. The current was still slamming my legs into the

craggy shore as I clung, breathless, to my tree branch. Only one word came to my mind and to my lips: *Jesus*.

I'm not quite sure now, looking back, if I was actually yelling it or only crying out in my mind, over and over, *Jesus, Jesus, save her! Please, Jesus*. I had no idea what was around that bend in the river. Benji had mentioned falls up ahead, but I didn't know how far, and all I could do was imagine the worst. *Jesus, I need You to save my baby. I need You to save her, Lord Jesus. Please. Please. Please. Over and over.*

I realized I was still pulling hard on a tree limb that might not support my weight much longer. Slowly, I pulled myself up onto a boulder in the beating sun. Though later I realized that I was covered in cuts and bruises, I didn't remember feeling any pain. The sound of the river roared in my ears as I situated myself and waved to Benji and the girls far away on the shore, trying to somehow let them know that I was all right but that I was also *alone*. I was too far away to make out the expressions on their faces, and I wasn't sure how much they had been able to see.

No one seemed to be moving very frantically (though I later learned that a few of them had run up to get help from someone at the campsite), and I wondered why no one was screaming or crying in horror at the fact that I had surely just lost their sister to the raging rapids. I tried yelling to them that I couldn't see her and she wasn't safe, but the rushing water drowned out my voice. A few of them waved back, seemingly unfazed.

As I watched my family walking toward me, I never stopped calling out to Jesus to save our daughter. I don't know how long I sat there. It felt like a blink and also an eternity. It was certainly long enough to envision every possible worst-case scenario. I chided myself for being so foolish and overconfident and not heeding the warning of the sign. My mind filled with thoughts of having to search the river for a body. I sat on my rock, exhausted from both the river and

the flood of emotions, and I prayed.

And then as Benji and the girls approached from my left through the bushes, another set of footsteps came running from a different path to the right. I caught a glimpse of her yellow swimsuit. I heard her voice. There she was!

She ran toward me and I shouted her name as she stumbled into my arms. "Are you okay?" I yelled, even though my face was right next to hers. "I thought I'd lost you. I thought you were gone! Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay!" she chuckled nonchalantly. "Some fishermen came and pulled me out. They were getting out of the water with their boat, but I called for them and they came back to get me. They put me on the shore just over there."

*Fishermen?* I briefly wondered. *People don't fish in water this fast.* I hadn't seen any fishermen or fishing boats on this stretch of the water our entire trip (and I didn't see any after that day either).

"I'm so sorry," I kept repeating. I was hugging her too tight. I finally pulled myself away to look into her eyes. "Were you so scared?" I asked.

"Nah." She shrugged. "I just kept thinking, *I'll find another way out.*"

And she bounded off, laughing with her sisters, joking that they were done swimming for the day.

I held it together for another minute as the rest of our girls called out to me, "You okay, Mom?" before heading back to camp. But when I got midway up the hill and found my husband's embrace, I let myself fall apart.

"I couldn't reach her," I sobbed. "I couldn't get to her. I lost her. I thought I lost her."

"It's all right. She's okay. You're okay," he whispered.

We stood like that for a long time while my breathing slowed and I let my panic fade. Then, ever gentle and kind, Benji took my hand.

“Come on. Let me show you something.”

He led me to the top of the riverbank, where I could see, way down below, my life-saving little tree sticking out just before the river opened up into all its glory—roaring, wide and expansive. We walked farther up, to a place I couldn’t have seen when I was in the water. As we stood looking out, Benji pointed to all the additional places our daughter would have been able to get out had the fishermen not pulled her to safety. There was a tiny island she might have been able to swim over to. There was a break in the current where she could have headed toward the next little bay. Long before the falls, which turned out to be more than half a mile away, there were several calm places where someone could have gotten out of the current and to safety. He said, “Sure, some of these routes might have made it more difficult and a lot more time-consuming for you to get back to us at camp, but I knew you both would be all right.”

The fishermen were behind our miraculous rescue that day, and I will forever believe that God sent them specifically for us. But from the top, looking out at the whole picture, it was clear that even if He hadn’t sent those fishermen, He had also provided many other paths to rescue.

Immediately, it all felt incredibly safe again. My recent fear and panic seemed silly and unnecessary. I had grabbed the branch of a tree, imagining that the worst was right around the corner, but even if I hadn’t, there would have been a number of routes to safety. Our daughter had been rescued by people and a boat, but now, seeing the whole map of the river’s twists and turns, I knew she would have been fine regardless.

I stood there for a long time that day, watching the river. The water level rose and fell as the day went on. Sometimes the current spiraled furiously, and sometimes it was much more calm. The same phrase kept dropping into my mind as I looked out at what I had once thought to be perilous: *we were safe all along*.

Later that evening, I snapped a photo of the rushing current in the bay. Once again, it appeared to flow in a circular motion, right back to the shore, but I knew better. Each time I look at that picture, I praise God for His provision in the fishermen that day, reminded that He saved both me and my daughter from the waves. As I look at that image, a sense of peace washes over me. At eye level, it appeared that we were in grave danger, chaos surrounding us, but from up above it was clear: We were safe in the rushing river, guarded by a God who could see the whole picture and had a good plan. The Lord, our savior.

WE DIDN'T GET back in the river on that trip—well, at least not in that same spot. Now that I had seen the whole river with all its many currents from above, from high up on the riverbank, it felt completely safe, with many ways out and various opportunities to rest. I almost wanted to try swimming in there again, with the new confidence I had that we would be all right. I thought of how much I would have actually enjoyed the adrenaline rush of the rapid water if I had been certain we would get out safely. But I kept reminding myself how it had felt to be eye level with the waves, and I knew I would be completely unnerved if I tried to do it again. Instead, we moved upriver a few miles and found a still place to paddleboard and kayak and swim.

For many weeks after, I kept reliving my fear as the water crashed around me, as I watched my beloved child swept around the river bend out of my sight. Then I'd remember my relief when I changed perspectives and could see the river from above, the whole picture.

I realized it isn't so different for the difficult seasons that we inevitably pass through in this life. Caught up in the storms and rapids of challenging circumstances, with the waves at eye level, our scary

or uncertain situations often seem impossible to escape. We can feel sure that this will be the end of us, that this will be the thing we will not overcome. From inside the current, we can see only a very small piece of the river, and it *is* scary.

But I imagine that for God it looks a whole lot more like what I saw standing on the edge of the riverbank with Benji, realizing that we had always been safe, that there had been so many different places to get out. God sees the whole picture: all the twists and turns, the places where the rapids swirl, the places of calm where we could swim lazily, the islands and tree branches that provide a place to rest, the people along the way who provide encouragement. He sees the whole trajectory of our lives, and He sees all that He is doing in each situation, working all things for good,<sup>2</sup> even in the midst of something that doesn't look good.

I reflected on the past few years for our family, all we had endured and all the situations I'd thought might take us under, tear our family apart, or completely destroy any good thing we had worked for. There were times when I thought my faith might be completely wrecked and I wondered how I would keep holding on. In the middle of those hardships, I couldn't have ever imagined that we would be here, together, healing, laughing, and worshipping God, who had carried us through. Even when we couldn't see it, even when we felt sure the rapids of life would pull us under, we were safe in His hands.

"My flesh and my heart may fail," says the psalmist, "but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."<sup>3</sup> When my strength, my heart, my faith, my whole life seemed to fail, God held me safe.

As He says through the prophet Isaiah,

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;



and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.  
For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.<sup>4</sup>

I can add nothing but my testimony: God is who He says He is, and when we cannot hold on any longer, He will not let go. He will carry us.

If you do not know Jesus and have made it this far, I am so glad you are here. It is my bold prayer that you would meet Him in these pages. I pray that you would know Him to be a God who is not just an authority but a dear friend, a God who not only sees but understands your pain and came to die so that you may one day be free from all pain and suffering. If I could, I would pat the seat next to me on the couch and beckon you to come. And I would grab your hand, dear one, and tell you that He wants you, He is wildly and urgently pursuing you, and the greatest desire of His tender heart is for you to intimately know Him and be known by Him, to experience the deep abounding peace that only He can offer. That is why He came. That is why He died.

The peace I experienced after I had seen our path from high above on the shore was completely opposite the panic I had felt as I was tossed and thrown by the waves. In the same way, the joy I felt to be out in His amazing creation with my family stood in stark contrast to the chaos and anxiety that had often colored the past few years. At eye level, the circumstances of our lives were overwhelming, but from far above, it was beautiful.

For the rest of our trip, as I looked out at the river, I imagined different ways I might have approached our trials of the past many

years if I had seen it all in advance and known that we would be here together and that our lives would not be utterly ruined or irreparably broken. And I thought of the peace that would be mine if I could go through life having first seen the view from above, the entire plan. If I could see all the ways that hard things would grow me and strengthen my faith and if I could be certain that at the end we really would all be okay. What if—even as the waters of life rose around me, around my loved ones—I could live in the confidence I'd known that day on the bank that we were indeed safe all along?

I know, both from experience and from what I read in Scripture, that though my family and I have faced our fair share of hardships, and certainly will again, none of us will ever be outside the reach of God, who sees the whole plan from above, who knows exactly what He is doing and where we are going.

And I want desperately to learn how to live in the certainty of this truth. I want to live in a peace that is not dependent on my circumstance but on the unchanging character of my God.

I didn't know it yet on that trip, but He would soon move us into a season just as challenging as the one before. Illness and crisis would once again rear their ugly heads in our family. Lockdown would end but restart shortly after with the onset of a new Covid-19 variant. We would again walk with friends and neighbors who were starving, desperate, without jobs and basic provisions, and often without hope. We would find ourselves unexpectedly living in a new country, on a new continent, for an indefinite period of time, deeply grieving a life that we adored and a place we had expected to call home for years to come, deeply lonely in ways we had never experienced. And just as before, we wouldn't be able to see the whole plan, to know what was coming next or what was around the bend.

I believe that the Lord is intentional in not allowing us to see the whole plan or know the ending. Though those few minutes on the rock were excruciating, I can remember only a handful of other

times when I have cried out to Him with such urgency. Because I couldn't see the whole story, I called out to Jesus as if my life, and my daughter's, depended on it.

But I don't want to move through life as the panicked, fearful woman I was in the rapids. I want to live as the steady version of myself who stood on the riverbank rather than the frantic version of myself caught in the waves. I want to call out to Jesus as if my life depends on it, because it does, and I want to do so with the certainty that He will, He has, rescued us. I want to be a steady, unanxious person of prayer not just for my own mental, emotional, and spiritual health but for my family, my community, and all those who might catch a glimpse of Christ through me. I want to live out of the place of peace that Jesus promises.

"Peace I leave with you," Jesus says,<sup>5</sup> but if I am honest, in the midst of life's rapids, the trials and the hardship and the hurt, as the waters rise and the fire blazes, peace is hard for my heart and mind to grasp. After our encounter at the river, I began to earnestly study peace and ask God for it. I don't want to just know what the peace of Christ is; I want to live in the confidence and security that God has promised me. I want to be both desperate for Him and deeply anchored in His certain peace as the world around me spins in chaos.

Maybe you do too? I believe that in Christ this is possible. And I believe we can learn together. We can learn to truly believe that He sees all our days and allows the scary and uncertain situations only as a means to draw us to Him, to cause us to cry out desperately for Him and lean into Him in new ways. We can walk in the confidence we might have if we could see the ending, *even though we can't*. We can learn to live in the steady assurance that in Christ, we are safe all along.

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Katie Davis Majors

*New York Times bestselling author of Kisses from Katie*

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