



U N A F R A I D

Trusting God in an Unsafe World

Susie Davis

Praise for
Unafraid

“Susie Davis invites us into her own story with grace and hospitality, tenderness and courage. If you’ve ever been overwhelmed by fear, you’ll be so thankful for the way Susie takes you by the hand and leads you to a better way of living.”

—SHAUNA NIEQUIST, author of *Bread & Wine*

“Don’t pick up *Unafraid* if you’re looking for a how-to manual. Instead, it’s an engrossing and epic true story that at once puts you at ease and challenges you to live more freely. It’s unlike any Christian book I’ve ever read. It was so crazy good that I got to the end and wished there were more.”

—HAYLEY MORGAN, writer of thetinytwig.com

“I am a Susie Davis fan! Susie speaks to my soul. She draws me from the shore of safety into the deeper waters of the Spirit. *Unafraid* will beckon you to begin with abandon a new journey with God. Susie’s soul is the inkwell, her heart is the quill, and her words are the invitation: fear not for the Lord is with you.”

—RANDY PHILLIPS, lead pastor at LifeAustin
Church and member of Phillips, Craig, and Dean

“When we bow to the god of fear, we think we will be safe, but that’s a lie. Our lives diminish as fear gains more ground. Having witnessed her beloved teacher’s murder, Susie Davis understands that bad things happen. That’s what makes her journey from paralyzing fear to trusting faith so compelling. I can’t wait to give *Unafraid* to some of my clients.”

—LESLIE VERNICK, licensed counselor, relationship coach, speaker, and author of *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*

“Susie Davis offers a timely message of hope in a world that seems completely out of control. This book is a very personal and honest account of her experience with trauma and subsequent fears. She offers profound lessons of faith and trust based on her extraordinary story. It is truly an amazing God-story of redemption and hope.”

—DR. SAM ADAMS, psychologist and coauthor of *Out of Control: Finding Peace for the Physically Exhausted and Spiritually Strung Out*

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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For my dad



Because trees really are the best preachers

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The page is decorated with stylized leaf illustrations. In the top right corner, there is a cluster of leaves. In the top left corner, there is a single leaf. In the bottom left corner, there is a larger cluster of leaves. The leaves are rendered in a light gray, semi-transparent style.

Introduction

The Invitation

At twelve years old I met Jesus. I adored him . . . everything about him. When I read the Bible and it said God had good plans for me, I believed every word.¹

Then at fourteen I saw my teacher murdered. It was May, the end of junior high school, when a fellow classmate—a neighbor boy—walked into our classroom with a rifle and shot and killed my teacher.

God may have saved me, but the experience of witnessing a murder crashed in unexpectedly and made me afraid. So afraid that I felt as if I had lost God somehow—or, even worse, that he had lost me. At fourteen I was forced to try to come to terms with this big, bad world we live in, and I was very fearful.

I loved God, but I did not trust him. Trusting God meant things might go wrong again, and I couldn't afford to let that happen because then I would feel all the pain again. The pain of bad things. And with the pain, the lingering question, *why do bad things happen?*

I spent half my life being afraid, and by that I mean scared to stay alone in my house at night. As a teenager, I was so freaked out by being alone I would hide under the kitchen counter with the phone on my ear, anxious about things in the dark and terrified by the neighbor boy still living up the street.

The weird thing about being afraid for a long time is that you get comfortable with it. And before long you start to believe fear itself keeps you safe and keeps bad things from happening. I felt like fear protected me. As long as I stayed vigilant, cautious, and wary, nothing bad would happen. Instead of depending on God for protection, I held tight to something destructive. Like an addict, I depended on something harmful and dangerous. Something that became a tool for the Enemy to push me in the corner, keep me under the counter, beat me down.

I believed in fear.

I felt hopeless trying to live with a Savior who didn't seem to keep me safe from the bad things and was completely worn-out trying to take care of myself. Over the years my fears spiraled out of control. I was afraid for my children. I became the mom who hypermanaged, helicopter-parented, and over-

The Invitation

thought every little thing, because fear told me that was my job. I obsessed about my husband's safety because fear lived by my side, whispering horrible things about the worst-case scenarios. If you had looked into my life, you would have seen me peeking in the closets for bad guys, double- and triple-checking doors at night, obsessively washing my toddlers' hands.

Fear infects your life in weird ways when you believe in it, always think on it, worship it. You become a fear-er. Only I didn't think I was a fear-er. I thought I was c-a-r-e-f-u-l. I thought I was being a good mom. A caring wife. But really, I was afraid. I couldn't see how fear changed me—and how the Enemy took advantage of me.

“Here begins the Good News about Jesus . . .”²

But God was not content to let me sit scared to death, scrunched under the counter, cowering, while the Enemy pounded me with more and more fear. Eventually I let God rescue me.

And he wants to rescue you too. I promise. God does not want you stuck under the counter or wherever the Enemy has you holed up. God wants you free. Really free. And he wants you with him . . . looking to him, trusting him, finding security in him.

By reading about how God has cared for me in some hard situations, I hope you will see how creatively and tenderly he cares for you. I pray you can learn to live unafraid in the midst

Unafraid

of an often terrible and terrifying world because you know and believe in a real way that God has good plans for your life. And because, deep down, you are able to trust God. I pray you are able to know he loves you too much to ever abandon you in any situation. Not then, not now, not ever.

This is the invitation.

On the Curb

I don't actually remember my dad planting the cottonwood tree, but I know he planted it as a seedling. He always planted seedlings. I can picture him now, loading buckets of water into his red Volkswagen convertible. Like a big weeping willow sweeping back and forth in the wind, he moved from the hose by our house to his car, carrying the buckets. All this so he could water a little tree at the junior high school down the street. I was maybe six years old.

I remember he would put the pails on the floorboard of his old VW bug, and then he'd have me sit in the backseat between them so I could try to hold them still while he slowly drove the three blocks to the school grounds. Everything looked crazy out

of control in those buckets. Water sloshed over the edges, soaking my T-shirt and shorts. Water rolled around on the floorboard. All this for a tree—a scraggly cottonwood he planted without permission on school property.

This particular cottonwood needed extra attention because there were no hoses nearby. After all, this tree wasn't supposed to be there. It wasn't a part of the master plan—at least not part of the school's master plan. That's why my dad had me help him water it.

My dad was a hip tree hugger before anyone knew what it meant to be green. As a matter of fact, if you look in his backyard today, you'll see five or six mismatched tubs full of dirt and little saplings. Cottonwoods, bur oaks, mimosas—my dad loves them all. He keeps them close to the house and waters them religiously with a nearby hose.

Eventually I inherited my dad's love of trees, but my reason is a little different from his. It's because I finally realized that God has been leaving me love notes all my life—and I don't mean scribbles on little pieces of paper. God has been leaving me tangible signs of how much he loves me. And most often God leaves me love notes through trees.

My dad always says trees are the best preachers, and I agree. Trees are the conduits for some of the biggest messages God has ever spoken to me. At every season in my life, there is a tree with

God saying, *I love you. I'm thinking of you. I'm protecting you. I have good plans.*

The curious thing is, my dad made me water the very tree that became one of the biggest love notes God ever wrote me. I just didn't see it at the time—or for a very long time, really.

It works like that sometimes. We don't see how God loves and cares for us, especially when we're afraid, and we mistake our lack of vision for a lack of God's care. Like a seed in the ground, God's care lies deep underneath, but sometimes we miss it.

THE GOD WHO SEES ME

At times in my life, I wish I were more like Hagar in the Bible. Here was a woman who experienced the reality of an unsafe world at the hands of someone who was supposed to take care of her. Pregnant and alone, she fled into the desert because she was terrified for her life. But God was right there. He was thinking of her, protecting her, and making good plans for her even when things looked bleak. Through an angel he comforted her with words of hope, promising that her baby would be safe. And there she confessed, “You are the God who sees me . . . who looks after me.”¹

God doesn't often speak through angels—at least not to

me. But he was speaking to me in other ways. I just had to pay attention.

God is speaking to you too. It may not be through an angel or through trees, but he is speaking. Directly to you.

There are so many times in normal, everyday life when it doesn't really seem as if God is doing anything special—aside from keeping the sun up in the sky and other such wonders. But the little things? Do you ever feel that he is too busy to be in the smallest details of life? I did.

But the Bible says God pours down his blessings.² *Pours down his blessings*. Like big, sloshing buckets of water being poured over a tiny cottonwood tree. Now I see that's me getting soaking wet with all those blessings. But it took me years to recognize it, and I certainly didn't see it when I was fourteen. Then, and for a very long time, I felt cheated. And alone. I was completely hung up on the world being a big, bad place. I felt overwhelmed trying to take care of myself and understand everything.

Don't get me wrong. I prayed and held on to God as best I could. But I just didn't see the buckets of blessings. I didn't see God working. I got God as the creator of the universe, the sustainer of the world. But I just wasn't so sure he was into the little stuff—like watching after me in my everyday life.

Now I know God always wants my attention. I have found he'll stop at nothing to get it. But it's hard to see God's love and

care when fear is staring you in the face. Fear makes you blind . . . and deaf and dumb. Unable to see or hear or feel those buckets of favor pouring over you. Unable to utter thanks for all the tiny drops of God's goodness.

CURB TO CURB

I'm still trying to figure out exactly when and how fear first entered my life, because I don't remember being afraid as a young child. I do remember boldly running over to my neighbor Frances's house when I was five because she had a gum drawer, and when I was seven, I fearlessly rode my bike too fast down the hill on our street and busted my chin. I also remember at the age of nine playing kick the can with the neighbor kids in the cove at dusk all summer long.

I grew up in the kind of neighborhood where you could play outside long past dark, and there was no reason to be afraid. That was a time when kids could run yard to yard, house to house, and at the end of the day moms would yell out the front door for their kids to come home for dinner. My home, our street, our little cove community felt safe.

My best friend, Julia, lived right across the street from me. I loved going to Julia's. Her mom, Anna, used to make us snacks of chocolate ice cream and salty skinny pretzel sticks. When I was very young, I wasn't allowed to go to Julia's without

permission or to cross the street by myself. If Julia and I couldn't get our moms to agree to a play date, we'd sit on the curbs in front of our houses—Julia on one side of the street and me on the other—and we would talk there. When cars started down the street, we would scoot back into our yards, because our mamas told us cars were dangerous. But curb to curb, life was safe.

Wouldn't it be great if we could rewind to another time or do life curb to curb and make it safe? Then we'd never have to be afraid. We'd never have to worry about our babies getting sick. We'd never have to watch news stories about people being gunned down in shopping malls or schoolyards or churches. Never worry about abductions or all the other monstrosities wrecking people's lives. Never worry about divorce or losing a job or making ends meet. Never worry about those things that make you worry. If we could only live unafraid.

But life is not a simple math equation. One plus one rarely equals two. So we worry and feel afraid. Have you noticed how fear doesn't follow any rules? Fear is a rule breaker. A fake-out. A liar. And we all learn to fear soon enough. Even if you haven't had bad things happen directly to you, I'll bet you learned fear anyway. Fear creeps in through books, television, and other people's stories.

I think I first learned fear that way. So much so that by the time I was ten and in fourth grade, I didn't want to stay home alone. My mom was a teacher, so she wasn't home in the afternoons. I let myself in the house through a door that was left unlocked or with a key hidden in the garage. Pretty standard for the seventies.

Sometimes, after I'd let myself into the house after school, I'd hide in the closets. Squished in between the coats in the hall closet, I felt safe. But then it would get quiet. And I'd listen . . . for fear . . . never realizing it was sitting right next to me.

Some days I would peptalk myself into being brave. I'd march into the house, turn on the television, and watch *Little House on the Prairie* so loud that I couldn't hear the fear. I needed the goodness of the show to drown out the bad stuff in my mind. *What if there's someone in the house with me? What if that creaking is someone walking around upstairs? What if our little sheltie can't fight off the bad guys?* I was a ten-year-old kid with a big imagination.

My friend Cat and I now tease each other because we know we're HSP (highly sensitive people). We're the first to hear a baby crying on an airplane or notice that the drummer's too loud on stage at church. We get extra cold if the air conditioner is blowing hard, and we're likely to say so. Who knows? Maybe being an HSP or having a big imagination was why I was so

aware of the voice of fear at a young age. But I also think the Enemy wants a foothold anywhere he can find one. For me, the foothold was fear.

Katie, a young mom I mentor, told me that when she was little, she used to fall asleep listening to talk radio. She said she needed the friendly voices when she fell asleep because there were so many angry voices in her family, and they made her feel afraid. Fear started calling her name as a child.

And my friend Ronne told me that when she was young, after her mom tucked her into bed at night, she would crawl on the floor to her mother's bedroom. She was afraid of the shadows standing behind her bedroom window because once she had seen a man staring in at her. She worried he'd come back one day and steal her away.

Fear whispers when we're young. It follows us when we're older. And somewhere along the way, we start to think it's normal to be afraid.

Have you ever experienced this? Letting the what-ifs overwhelm you? Turning up the *Little House* volume loud so you can't hear the questions in your head: *What if something happens to my kids at school? What if my husband doesn't make it home from his business trip? What if God gives me more than I can handle?*

No matter if we're ten or thirty or fifty, I think we're all little on the inside when it comes to fear. We're always looking

for safety. For places where nothing bad ever happens. But the quest for safety and insulation from anything bad takes us to all the wrong places instead of to the right one.

THE ANTIDOTE TO FEAR

At twelve I thought I had met the antidote to fear: Jesus. My family was at a Young Life retreat, and a college kid named Kenny took time to sit down and tell me the story of Jesus and how he had changed his life. I had heard about Jesus before in church services, but the Jesus I learned about in church didn't seem as real to me as the Jesus that Kenny described.

Kenny and I sat at the edge of the Frio River while upstream kids played guitars and sang. It was kind of romantic, and Kenny was kind of cute. But at some point I stopped caring about how cute Kenny was and started listening to his story. I was overwhelmed at what he told me—that God loved me so much he sent Jesus to rescue me from all sin.

I didn't feel as though I had a lot of sin, but I knew I had enough to need Jesus. I knew I needed relief from the thick, heavy, bad feelings I got when I messed up. Like how I felt when I was mad at my friends but lied by saying no when they asked if I was mad. Or when I was rude to my mom for dumb things like how she ironed my shirt. Or when I cheated in math class by peeking at my neighbor's work sheet, or when I said

mean things about people I didn't like at school. Stuff that might not seem big to an adult but is grave for a sixth grader.

So I prayed right there, with big tears streaming down my face, for God to be my everything. For Jesus to be my hero, to take away all the blah, yucky stuff clogging up my heart. And Jesus said yes to me.

Back at home I started reading the Bible, and it was even better than I thought. When I read my Living Bible, Jesus was all rainbows and butterflies. He was all good news, good plans, and a good life. The Young Life kids who loved Jesus in such a real way were now streaming in and out of our house because my parents offered to host weekly dinners for them. They were so happy and funny and free. I was all in with this Jesus. I felt nothing could come between us.

But, of course, something did. Something horrible crashed in unexpectedly. And along with it a stronghold of fear that lasted more than a decade and crippled my ability to see how God flooded my life with love. For so long I was blind to his love notes.



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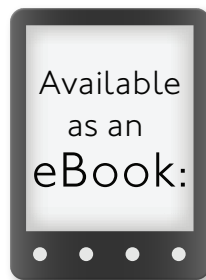
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