

MAX LUCADO

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

UNBREAKABLE COURAGE

STRONG FAITH IN AN AGE OF
ANXIETY, CHAOS, AND EXHAUSTION

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SNEAK
PEEK

Chapter 1

**UNBREAKABLE
COURAGE**

ALSO BY MAX LUCADO

INSPIRATIONAL

3:16

A Gentle Thunder
A Love Worth Giving
And the Angels Were Silent
Anxious for Nothing
Because of Bethlehem
Before Amen
Come Thirsty
Cure for the Common Life
Facing Your Giants
Fearless
Glory Days
God Came Near
God Never Gives Up on You
Grace
Great Day Every Day
He Chose the Nails
He Still Moves Stones
Help Is Here
How Happiness Happens
In the Eye of the Storm
In the Grip of Grace
It's Not About Me
Just Like Jesus
Max on Life
More to Your Story
Next Door Savior
No Wonder They Call Him the Savior
On the Anvil
Outlive Your Life
Six Hours One Friday
Tame Your Thoughts
The Applause of Heaven
The Great House of God
Traveling Light
Unshakable Hope
What Happens Next
When Christ Comes
When God Whispers Your Name
You Are Never Alone
You'll Get Through This
You Were Made for This Moment

COMPILATIONS

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In the Footsteps of the Savior
Jesus
Start with Prayer
They Walked with God

FICTION

Christmas Stories
Miracle at the Higher Grounds Café
The Christmas Candle

BIBLES (GENERAL EDITOR)

Children's Daily Devotional Bible
Grace for the Moment Daily Bible
The Lucado Encouraging Word Bible
The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A Max Lucado Children's Treasury
Anxious for Nothing (Young Readers Edition)
Bedtime Prayers for Little Ones
Calm Thoughts for Kids
God Always Keeps His Promises
God Bless This Child
God Forgives Me, and I Forgive You
Grace for the Moment: 365 Devotions for Kids
Hermie, a Common Caterpillar
I'm Not a Scaredy Cat
Itsy Bitsy Christmas
Just in Case You Ever Feel Alone
Just in Case You Ever Wonder
Lucado Treasury of Bedtime Prayers

One Hand, Two Hands

Thank You, God, for Blessing Me
Thank You, God, for Loving Me
The Crippled Lamb
The Oak Inside the Acorn
You Can Count on God: 100 Devotions for Kids
Where'd My Giggle Go?

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

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Promise Book
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You Were Made to Make a Difference

GIFT BOOKS

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Fear Not Promise Book
God Is with You Every Day
God Thinks You're Wonderful
God Will Carry You Through
God Will Help You
Grace for the Moment
Grace Happens Here
Happy Today
Hope for Hard Days
Let the Journey Begin
Safe in the Shepherd's Arms
Trade Your Cares for Calm
You Can Count on God
You Changed My Life

UNBREAKABLE COURAGE

STRONG FAITH IN AN AGE OF
ANXIETY, CHAOS, AND EXHAUSTION

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Unbreakable Courage

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CHAPTER 1

OUTNUMBERED

On one side is you. Just you, all by your lonesome. Not you plus your allies. Not you plus your platoon. Not you plus your friends. You look around for help. No one. It's just you. One single, solitary version of you.

On the other side is *them*. More of them than you can count. More enemies than you can number, problems than you can solve, changes than you can tolerate, offenses than you can forgive, fears than you can face, questions than you can answer, health issues than you can treat, bills than you can pay, deadlines than you can meet. More and more of *them*.

You *versus* them. You are . . .
outnumbered
outpaced
outdone
outgunned
outmaneuvered
out there in the tempest all alone

The odds are against you. It's 850 to 1.

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Those were the odds against Elijah.

Take an average high school gymnasium. Fill one side with *them*. Put *him* on the other side. You've got the picture. Or try this: dot a whiteboard 850 times. Dot. Dot. Dot. Dot. Not a 100 or 200 but 850 times. Each dot is a bad dude. Each dude wants Elijah dead. They all worship a dead god. Elijah worships the living God. His story is all about bad odds and odd gods. Their god is odd. The odds against him are bad. And Elijah is in the middle of it all.¹

His enemies are cultish priests. They wear white linen robes.² They dance and chant on Mount Carmel. They cry out for heaven to rain fire down upon this usurper, this godless, slithering snake.

At least that is what the king of Israel called him. Yes, the king is on the side of these bad dudes. So is his wife, Jezebel. In fact, she is the baddest of the bad. She feeds food to the false prophets. They feed lies to the people of Israel about the foreign god named Baal³: how he controls the womb, rain, and soil. Elijah calls Baal a hoax and calls for a showdown between Jehovah, the one true God, and Baal, the impotent statue. King Ahab takes the bait. He will for the last time silence this pathetic, prophetic pain in the neck.

He's woolly, this Elijah. Unkempt. Unbridled. Skin leath-ered from years in the sun. Cheeks sunken from meager meals. His robe is tattered, and his sandals are thin. But don't think him to be frail. His appearance may not turn your head, but his faith might change your heart. If the Olympics had an event for Gibraltar faith, Elijah would wear the gold medal. He has tapped into a divine reservoir, and that source is the

reason for his bold challenge. Fire is about to fall, and he knows it.

Who is this man? And what in the world does his world have to do with you?

Let's start with that last question. His story is relevant because the challenges he faced are similar to yours. Ninth century BC was not a good era for the Jews.⁴ King after

king was corrupt to the core. The epitaph of each was the same sad sentence: "He did evil in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kings 15:26 NKJV). The first king was murdered by his successor (vv. 27–28). Then came a drunk and after him a murderer (16:8–10). That king was guilty of treason (v. 20). Then came a king about whom the words were written, "[He] did worse than all that were before him . . . to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger" (vv. 25–26 KJV).

Less than a hundred years earlier, King Solomon had dedicated the glorious temple of Jerusalem. Some Jews were old enough to recall the golden era of faith. They were acquainted with the blessings of a God-centered culture. But over the course of a lifetime, the people drifted. By the time Elijah appeared on the scene, Israel was six decades and four kings deep in a cesspool of death and decadence. Ungodly idol worship. Unholy clergy. Unbridled evil. Untold sordid scandals. Sound like a good era in which to live?

Sound like the era in which we live?

I've never been sympathetic to comments about "the good ol' days." One hears about them often. *Back in the good*

If the Olympics had an event for Gibraltar faith, Elijah would wear the gold medal.

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ol' days families were stronger, people worked harder, the church was happier, the football team was better. I always dismissed such comments as romantic nostalgia.

Not any longer. According to Gallup the last twenty years have seen an increasing departure from former values. Attitudes have become more permissive regarding “divorce, having a baby outside of marriage, gambling, sex between an unmarried man and woman, sex between teenagers, birth control, and gay or lesbian relations.” As of 2022 each topic registered at its highest ever point of moral acceptability. In fact, “though small minorities of US adults think suicide (22 percent) and polygamy (23 percent) are morally acceptable, the percentage saying so are the highest since Gallup’s first measure in 2001.”⁵

“The share of US adults who say they pray on a daily basis has been trending downward, as has the share who say religion is ‘very important’ in their lives.”⁶

In a historical blink of an eye, we are shedding old beliefs and grasping for new ones. What was once unthinkable is acceptable today.

The world around us is changing.

What’s more, the world *within* us is challenging.

Cases of depression are at a historical high, rising fastest among young adults and lower income people.⁷ Opioid addiction has turned into a public health epidemic.⁸ Eighty-four percent of Americans report feelings of extended stress.⁹ Eighty-four percent! That’s roughly 280 million stressed-out people. The US suicide rate is the highest it has been since World War II, up 33 percent since 1999.¹⁰

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Changes around us. Challenges within us. Does life feel like a tumble through the white waters of an angry river?

Our family experienced white waters a few years ago. Our oldest daughter was home from college. She'd brought a group of girls from around the country, each of them hoping to use spring break in South Texas as a time to thaw out after a frigid winter. My daughter's idea was a week of poolside naps and tanning.

Her dad's idea was an afternoon spent floating down the mainly calm, but every so often bouncy and bubbly Guadalupe River. The plan was simple. Rent kayaks. Double up. Start paddling. Make memories.

Little did I know how little we knew about kayaking.

It looks so simple. Dip the paddle. Pull. Dip the paddle again. Pull again. But my wife, Denalyn, and I couldn't get our rhythm going. Instead of forging ahead in a straight line, we zigzagged, first north, then south. We got sideways in the water and sideways with each other. By the time we reached the first set of rapids, we were barking orders, wrestling oars, and dodging rocks.

The exchange was less than pastoral.

Max, change sides!

I can't. We will tip over!

I'm steering!

No, I am!

Left!

No, right!

Back-pedal, back-pedal!

Rapids!

We hit the cascades head-on. The water fumed. The boat

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flipped. We fell in. That was the beginning of a long day and the beginning of the end of our boating career.

The memory of the flipped kayak came to mind as I was looking for a way to describe the challenges this book is meant to address. Chaos. Anxiety, Exhaustion. Fear. The white-knuckling tumbles through the white waters of life.

You know them. Not because of the Guadalupe River, but because of the economy. The threat of nuclear war. The school shootings. The homeless camps in your city. The state of your country. You're not riding a rocky river but a rocky existence, perhaps? It's not just the bad news in the headlines that is weighing you down. It's also the bad news at the doctor's office, the home office, the school administrator's office. You do your best to stay afloat, digging your oar first this way, then that. But currents pull and torrents fall, and sometimes you wonder if you'll survive.

Is it possible for a person of faith to have unbreakable courage in today's world?

UNBELIEF says, "It's my life; I live like I want."

FAITH says, "I'm God's child. I live like he wants."

UNBELIEF says, "You have your truth. I have my truth.

There is no universal truth."

FAITH says, "Jesus earned authority at the empty tomb. He is the way, the truth, and the life."

UNBELIEF says, "There is no future in this life and no promise of a next life."

FAITH says, "The purpose of this life is to discover and serve God. The purpose of the next is to live with him forever."

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UNBELIEF says, “The sky is falling, the sky is falling.
Disaster is imminent.”

FAITH says, “God is not surprised by the headlines.
He is in control, and his will will be done.”

Don't think for a second that the worldview of a Christ follower mirrors that of a nonbeliever. We are living in a culture that has little interest in people living out their faith. But we are not without help.

God's Bible is packed with stories of people of faith remaining strong during tough times. Joseph when he was imprisoned in Egypt. Joshua when he had to conquer the promised land. Daniel when he lived in exile in Babylon. Esther when she was exiled to Persia. The first disciples . . . These stories encourage and instruct us.

Elijah's story is one of them.

Prepare yourself for this guy. He was a bit rough around the edges. He was not fatherly like Abraham. Not pastoral like the apostle John. Not scholarly like the apostle Paul. Not nurturing like the mother Mary.

He was a lightning bolt in the night sky, a tornado on the open prairie. Untethered to popular opinion and unconcerned with political correctness. A gadfly in the throne room and a mayfly in history. Here one moment, gone in a blaze of glory the next.

He had two primary foes: Ahab and Jezebel.

There's a reason parents don't name their kids Ahab or Jezebel. Nothing virtuous is mentioned about them in Scripture. “Ahab . . . was king over Israel for twenty-two years. He ruled from Samaria. Ahab son of Omri did even

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more open evil before GOD than anyone yet—a new champion in evil!” (1 Kings 16:29–30 MSG). He not only neglected the faith of his fathers, but he also embraced the false gods of his enemies. He not only refused to worship Jehovah in the temple, but he also constructed idols in a pagan temple.

Yet this evil king did more. He married Jezebel.

She was vile, this woman, an uncompromising opponent of the Lord. Nasty. Stinky sock smelly. She wore the pants in the family. Ahab had the reign, but she had Ahab by the reins. She sought to establish Baalism as the state religion of Israel. While she was queen, the altars of the Lord were torn down (1 Kings 18:30; 19:10). She endorsed a religion that promoted temple prostitution and child sacrifice. She and her husband systematically killed the Lord’s prophets (1 Kings 18:13). At the height of her power, 850 apostates ate at her table (1 Kings 18:19).

No more notorious husband and wife team exists in all of Scripture. “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33 NASB). Thanks to Ahab’s evil and Jezebel’s ruthlessness, the Ten Commandments were treated as ten suggestions, and the temple of worship was a relic of history.

God, however, will not sit idly by while his covenants are trashed. He will not stay silent while his will is mocked. He will never act inappropriately or wantonly. But he will act.

He did so decisively sometime around 875 BC.

Three-and-one-half years prior to the duel at Mt. Carmel, “Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there

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shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word'” (1 Kings 17:1 NKJV).

With these words the prophet entered the story of Scripture. No preface. No background. Melchizedek-like. Just Elijah the Tishbite of Gilead. The United States has the Badlands of South Dakota and the raw terrain of the Big Bend. Ancient Israel had the scruffy hills of Gilead. Sheep grazed there; mountain streams flowed there. The region, like its most famous resident, was rugged.

The locals took pride in their land. The Jordan River separated them from their Jewish countrymen. Their bedouin dress of camel-hair cloaks and crude belts set them apart from the members of the Samaritan court.

They even spoke differently. In times of war they distinguished ally from foe by asking them to say the word *shibboleth* (Judges 12:5–6). Interlopers could never master the accent. Elijah was from this world. This raw, no-nonsense world.

Somewhere he discovered Yahweh. Perhaps the older men mentored him. It could be that he found his faith as he performed the menial tasks of caring for sheep or tending fields. Maybe his parents loved Jehovah? After all, they gave him his name: Elijah. *El* means “God,” *I* means “my.” *Jah* means “Yahweh.” Somewhere in the rugged land of Gilead, Elijah came to believe in a mighty Yahweh who refused to share his glory with others.

Elijah paid no homage to the king and queen. He had only one king and declared his name. “As the LORD God of Israel lives” (1 Kings 17:1 NKJV).

Here is how I envision the moment. Ahab and Jezebel are seated on their bejeweled thrones. Slaves fan and feed them.

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Armed soldiers guard them. Fawning followers pamper them. They lounge at tables and feast on food. Necklines are low. Cleavages are abundant. Men gape at women. Women flirt with men. It is carnal. It is fleshly.

Elijah bursts into the court. His appearance is a composite of the country where he was raised—shaggy locks, sinewy muscles, skin as coarse as a camel's hide, eyes ebony like the night.

Jezebel, the queen whose jet-black hair has a Cruella de Vil skunk stripe of white, stands to point a long fingernail. But before she can declare the interloper unfit for her court, Elijah announces, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, . . ."

You think the world rotates around you, Jezzie? Wrong. You think everyone bows before you? Wrong. You think you say, "Jump" and we say, "How high?" I don't. I stand before the Lord God of Israel. And by his power . . .

" . . . there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word" (17:1 NKJV).

Surgical strike. Baal was regarded as the god of fertility. Yet Baal's veil was about to be yanked back. Jehovah has declared a drought. Not a single drop of moisture will be allowed.

And as mysteriously as he appears, Elijah is off.

And so are we—off and running with a story as wild and woolly as the man it follows.

Does this man have some encouragement for our generation? Indeed he does.

Winds of society whip us. Each day brings a new challenge. Turn this way, there is conflict. That way, there is

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tension. Look behind you and a posse of problems is coming after you. It's enough to make a person want to give up. Give up on God. Give up on the future. Give up on life.

Just give up.

Yet the story of Elijah offers us hope. It is a field manual on how to thrive during a spiritual drought. Elijah shows us that one person following a living God is greater than hundreds of people praying to a lifeless one.

He shows us how to find faith in a white-water torrent of odd gods and bad odds. Do you feel it is you against the world? Not so, my friend. Outnumbered by foes and outdone by fear? Please reconsider. Surrounded by adversity? Perhaps. Yet, you are also encircled by divinity.

With God's help you can ride these raging rapids with unbreakable courage. Immovable. Determined. Square jawed and resolved. Like Elijah. He reminds us to

- wait for God in solitude and silence,
- pray impossible prayers,
- weather seasons of discouragement, and
- withstand the ungodly trends of society.

As much as any person in the Bible, Elijah affirms a positive answer to these questions: Can a person maintain faith in a world that has little? When a culture belittles belief, can a believer beget strength?

Yes!

His life urges us to take a note from the playbook of LeeAdianez Rodriguez-Espada. She was twelve years old when she signed up for a 5K race in Rochester, New York. Her

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mom dropped her off and then drove to a parking lot near the finish line. She expected to see her daughter in about an hour.

But an hour came and went, and there was no sign of her. Within a few moments the mom began to panic. She contacted race organizers and police officers. Eventually the twelve-year-old was spotted. But she was not running in the 5K race. She was running a half marathon!

Here is what happened. The young girl arrived at the starting line just after the race began. She was at the back of the pack. She settled into a rhythm. Somewhere around mile four, she began to suspect a problem. The finish line was nowhere in sight.

She asked a fellow runner to point out the end of the race. That's when she realized her mistake. She was participating in the wrong event. The race was not five kilometers but 13.1 miles!

You and I have a lot in common with this young runner. The race is long—longer than we thought. The challenges are many—more than we ever imagined. The struggles are numerous—so numerous we want to quit. Step off the course and give up.

When our young friend realized her mistake, she chose to stay in the race. A police officer found her on the course of the Flower City Half Marathon. He told her that people were worried. The young runner said she couldn't quit. The race was different from the one she'd planned on and prepared for, but she wanted to finish it. She put one foot in front of the other until finally she put one foot over the finish line.

Her mother, when asked to explain her daughter's

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resilience, said, “She decided to just keep running and not give up.”¹¹

That’s all God wants of us. We need not finish first or fast or without foibles or fumbles. We just need to finish.

Elijah did. He never quit. Not during the drought. Not when under threat from the queen. Not when the enemies attacked him. Not when 850 antagonists came after him. Not when he battled his own despair.

He felt like throwing in the towel. He considered it. He almost did. But he didn’t.

Let Elijah’s story calm your fears and guide your steps. Faith in our living God ignites a force for living life. With God’s help we will discover strength to ride this storm, an unbreakable courage and steadfast faith.

I’ve always liked that word. *Steadfast*. It’s an old one. It traces back to the Old English word *stedefæst*, a combination of *stede*, meaning “place,” and *faest*, meaning “firmly fixed.” Unflinching. Unbudging. Unshaken. Not giving an inch. Yes, the world is changing, and, yes, your world is challenging, but here is the great news. You can have the steadfast faith of Elijah.

The proof is in the prophet.

WE HOPE YOU
ENJOYED A

SNEAK PEEK

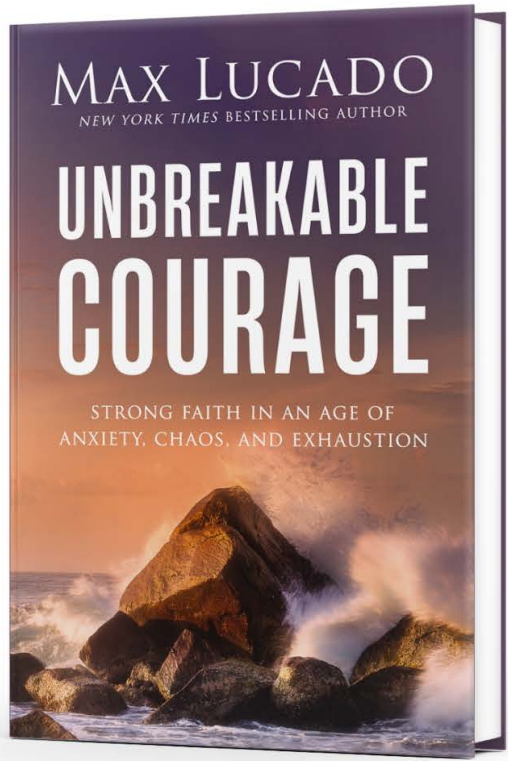
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