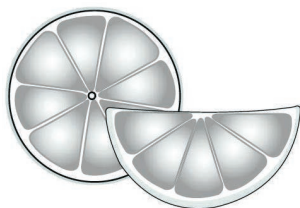


# 3

## Peace: Or Learning to Cat Nap



*For you did not receive a spirit  
that makes you a slave again  
to fear (Romans 8:15a)*

I own a cat with a severe anxiety problem. It got so bad once, that she even had to go on kitty-Prozac.

Most of you are probably thinking that Duane and I should stop getting pets. First we have a rabbit that goes for your jugular... now a cat with anxiety problems.

It all started out so innocently, really.

My dear, dear husband knows how much I love animals. I grew up surrounded by them on my parents' farm, and I owned, showed and/or trained horses since I was nine years old. And since the rabbit didn't work out too well as a "cuddler," Duane thought a kitten would be a great idea.

“But what about your allergies?” I asked. Unbeknown to us at the time of purchase, Scamper was an allergen. Duane was allergic. But rabbits only live about four or five years, and since she was now in year three, we figured we might as well keep her. After all, who else would want her?

“We’ll check it out,” he said.

So my wonderful husband went with me to a friend’s house. Christine had three house cats. We sat in the living room, figuring surely there was cat dander somewhere around, and Duane was fine. No reaction. No asthma attack. Not even after a couple of hours.

Test completed, we went to the Humane Society.

There were so many kittens! Cages were full of litters; some with two, some as many as five.

I fell in love with a tortoise shell and she lounged in my arms, purring peacefully when I took her away from her littermates. She was definitely a cuddle-cat.

“What about this one?” Duane’s voice broke through my reverie.

He pointed to a lone little kitten in a cage all by itself. It had climbed up onto the bars of the cage and was hanging from the door, claws extended, groping for dear life. All its little hairs stood on end, and its tiny pink mouth opened in loud yowls of fear.

“It’s scared,” said Duane.

The shelter manager took the kitten out and handed her to Duane. She was the tiniest kitten I had ever seen. She curled up against his chest and

fell immediately to sleep, like she had found peace at last.

“We’ve got to get her,” said Duane.

My husband has never been an animal lover, and it warmed my heart to see him attached to this tiny creature.

“Well... okay,” I said. But, I did point out the tortoise shell kitty sleeping in my own arms.

“She needs us,” he said, cuddling the sleeping kitten closer.

“Gardener,” as the shelter workers called her, was found in the parking lot of a grocery store. She was alone. They averaged her to be only about four weeks old, so we had to give her a special milk formula since she was supposed to still be nursing.

At home, I fixed up a basket with some blankets, and rolled up some socks for a chew toy. She was happy.

My mom said if we ever had children, she loved the southern charm in the name Ashley Mae for a girl. Since we didn’t have a child, we named the cat Ashley.

Ashley had a good kitten-hood, and all appeared normal. We kept her separated from Scamper for fear the bunny would hurt the tiny orange kitten. Silly, silly us. We should have let them duke it out.

All went well until the Bag Incident.

I was home alone at the time. I returned from a shopping trip and was putting groceries away. Apparently, Ashley thought the white plastic bags looked like they’d be fun to crawl inside.

But on the way in, her head got stuck in the handle.

I heard a yowl and turned just in time to see a streak of orange sail into the living room dragging a bouncing, billowing white bag along with her. Then, the streak sailed back past and into the bedroom.

“Ashley!” I called, running after her. “It’s okay girl!”

She sailed past me again, fright and adrenaline giving her speed. She was in a panic, blindly running around the house “away” from the terrifying bag, which billowed out behind her like a parachute. I couldn’t catch her and I started to get scared she was really going to hurt herself.

The more she ran, the more air “whooshed” into the bag, adding height and size to its scary white plastic proportions. She couldn’t get away from it. And here I was, running after her pleading with her to stop.

She ran around the house like this for several minutes and finally ran into the bathroom where she took a blind dive at the window above the bathtub. Her head hit with a loud *thunk* and she left a smeared wet mark on the glass, probably from her nose. She landed heavily in the bathtub below where I quickly threw a towel over her, secured her legs (and claws!) in it, and pulled the bag off her head.

She had changed. Her eyes were dark with fear, and she looked at me like she didn’t know me. Her lips curled back in a snarl and she started growling.

I put her down.

The next several hours were a bit traumatic for both of us. She seemed to be okay physically, so I went downstairs to start a load of laundry. She got on the steps above my head and assumed some type of attack position. She was crouched low, glaring at me as if the whole bag incident were my fault, and she was growling and yowling in that way that cats have. She had gone mad.

And I couldn't get up the stairs. Every time I tried, she crouched as if she was going to jump on my head from above.

I was trapped.

I considered grabbing the broom and "sweeping" her off the stairs, but I didn't want to traumatize her further. So I did the next best thing. I called Duane.

"The cat has me trapped in the basement," I said.

He laughed. Obviously he didn't understand the severity of the situation.

"No, really, she has me *trapped*," I said. "What should I do?"

He tried to calm me down, but I could tell he was holding back laughter. That made me mad. My cat was traumatized. She had gone mad. *I* was her victim.

So I hung up and called the Humane Society. First the lobsters, now the cat... they probably put my caller ID down on a list under "do not answer when this crazy lady calls."

"Put her in a dark, quiet place until her anxiety attack disappears," the nice guy on the other end

of the phone said. “Then you’ll be able to tell if she needs to go to the vet or not.”

Well, I would *gladly* put the cat in a nice quiet dark place if I COULD TOUCH HER. So, I did what I should have done all along. I prayed... for my life.

I’m not sure if God answered or if I finally got a clue, but I found her kitty-carrier that we used to take her to the vet and I opened the door and set it on the ground. She hates the thing, but apparently it looked appealing because she ran for it, curled up inside—facing me, of course—and continued her growling.

I ran up the stairs for safety.

It took Ashley several days to “come down” from her anxiety high. She was okay physically, but she was never quite the same mentally after that. She wasn’t mean, exactly, but she was prone to anxiety attacks if things got too loud, or people came to visit, or we rearranged the furniture. And it always took her a few days after each event to crawl out of the kitty carrier and rejoin us upstairs.

I tell you this story because I can relate. Several years into my marriage, I started battling anxiety myself.

Duane took me to the emergency room with chest pains one Sunday, and the doctor there told me that job changes and moving were listed in the top five, right under the death of a spouse, for highest causes of anxiety. We were doing both. By that time, I had moved twice and we had our house up for sale. I was finally leaving the bungalow on Belton that had

been our home for five years, and moving to a new colonial back in my hometown of Whitmore Lake. We were in the process of building that house and, in the meantime, staying in a friend's rented mobile home with most of our belongings in storage.

I had changed jobs several times. I had lost some, left some, and was running my fledging freelance writing business out of my home.

And we had some marriage problems. Stress will do that to you.

So it was only a matter of time, I guess, before I started having anxiety attacks.

In her book, *Under His Wings*, author Patsy Clairmont describes an anxiety/panic attack better than I've ever heard it described. An agoraphobic, afraid to leave her own home for several years, Patsy has some personal insight into the problem:

In my attempts to describe a panic attack, the word flush comes to mind. Not flush as embarrassed but flush as in toilet. A panic attack is like repeated flushes, not of water but of terror. This terror surges through your entire body.

Imagine your heart banging against your chest while your mind stampedes wildly. Then a quaking in your hands drops suddenly to your knees, leaving you weakened. Someone then backs onto your chest with a Mack truck, while another person shovels sand into

your lungs. Sustain those feelings for a few minutes and you have your basic panic attack. If you haven't had one, I don't recommend it. It isn't a comfy spot to hide out emotionally.<sup>4</sup>

I've been there. That pretty much sums it up.

And like all our other problems, God has the answer. Before we pick up the phone to call our best friend or seek a counselor, do we take it to God?

David says in Psalm 73 that the Lord shall guide me with His counsel. In the Psalms, he refers to God as a counselor many times. David knew something about needing counsel. He had, as we'd say in modern terms, a lot of baggage.

David spent many years running for his life from King Saul, who wanted nothing more than to see David's name on a tombstone. Talk about stress! And at that same time, David was in love with the king's daughter, and best friends with the king's son. When David was finally made king in Saul's place, his troubles were only beginning. Although he had an army to defend him, and his true love at his side, he faced both selfimposed stress and stress from outside sources.

What about the time he slept with *his friend's* wife, got her pregnant, and then had that man killed to try to cover up his secret? Do you think David was feeling a bit stressed out about that? I'm sure he had trouble sleeping at night. Or later, when that son died, oh the grieving he went through while the little



baby was on his deathbed. He pleaded with God, begged God to spare his child's life.

Or how about the time one of his other sons raped his daughter? That had to tear his heart apart.

The Apostle Paul was another man who faced stress. He carried around the memories of all the Christians he had killed before God spoke to him and changed his life. What about the children he had orphaned? The couples he had separated? The innocent lives he had destroyed?

Paul, too, would have had trouble sleeping at night except that he took it to God. And God changed him.

Paul promises: take it to God and you will have peace.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayers and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).*

Did you ever hear the story of the pink elephant? If someone tells you not to think of a pink elephant, what comes to your mind? A pink elephant, of course.

That's how our minds work. I spent a lot of time trying to forget the bad things that had happened to me. And I spent a lot of time trying not to worry about what I thought was going to happen next. But,

the more I worked at it, the more those worries kept haunting me, especially when I tried to sleep at night.

But Paul had a remedy for that. He said:

*Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:8).*

There was a time I was very sick and could hardly get out of bed. I'll talk more about that in the next chapter. But, what got me through those long months was that I learned to pray differently. Instead of asking God for healing, or for the ability just to get up long enough to wash the dishes or make lunch, I started thanking God for all that I had.

Every night, or every time I lay down in bed, I'd run down a list of what I had to be thankful for:

- My life... limited though it was at that time, I could still be a light for others.
- My husband, who brought in a paycheck.
- My mom and dad, who brought meals to me.
- My friends, who kept calling to check on me.
- The warm bed that I had to lie in.
- The doctors I had, and the insurance that paid for them.

The list went on. I found that I could be just as thankful for the way my slippers felt soft when I put them on in the morning, as I could for the fact that my tests from the hospital came back negative.

When your mind is full of God, there is no room for anything else.

All is okay on the outside if we are okay on the inside.

Americans spend countless dollars on relaxation. There are herbal remedies to help us sleep, vacations to “take us away from it all,” and how-to books on finding more time in our busy lives. There are numerous bins, baskets and other gadgets we can buy to organize our belongings and make them easier to find.

The Japanese believe that the way furniture is positioned in a room allows or restricts the flow of energy into the house, and thus affects your mood and energy level. There needs to be “flow space” with nothing blocking it.

I think we need “flow space” with God. We need to put away our planners, turn off the TV, turn the ringer off the telephone and get alone with God for a few minutes each day.

Anxiety is not from God. It’s an attack from the enemy.

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7, KJV).*

There's no better way to fight the enemy than to strengthen our forces and prepare for battle. And there's no better way to do that than to saturate ourselves in prayer and in the Word of God.

For a long time, I made a habit of getting up every morning and “dressing” myself prayerfully in spiritual armor, just as I dressed myself for the day. As I've added a child to my life, it has been more difficult for me to keep up a morning prayer time, but I find that I still pray the prayer and ask God for His strength.

No soldier would ever enter into battle without armor, and yet we Christians do it all the time. As soon as we wake up in the morning, the battle has begun. The enemy attacks in different ways, knowing our weaknesses even when we don't see them. But we aren't without protection.

Ephesians talks about the armor of God saying:

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:10-11).*

My favorite piece of armor is the shield of faith, “*with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*” (v. 16).

So next time you feel yourself under attack, suit up. And remember *whose* you are. He will protect you.

*Practice the presence of God.*





LEMON DROPS  
Peace



I used to take one day at a time, but sometimes more than one day attacks.

—Jennifer Unlimited

*For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone (Psalm 91: 11-12).*

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).*

If you would like to read more of the book, you can find it on Amazon!