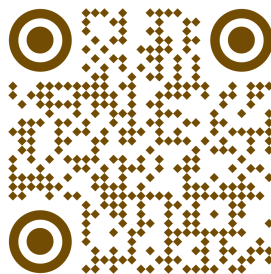


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Lions, Llamas, and Lamps

The story of Daniel and the Lion's Den (*Daniel 6:10-23*) moved to the front of my small brain while I was praying for this book. I love how alive God's Word is and how it'll come back to you at the perfect time; it does not return empty (*Isaiah 55:11*). I have heard this story so much, but I pulled out my Bible to see why the Holy Spirit wanted me to go there.

I'm glad I did.

There are so many great sermons just from Daniel 6 alone; it's very *meaty*—just don't tell the lions.

Here we see Daniel standing up for what's right. And his punishment? He's put on the lions' menu: Daniel Kabobs—rare!

He is thrown into a den of lions and left there to be eaten, but Daniel was not eaten or even nibbled on. God shut the mouths of the lions! (Hope you've read the story already. If not, spoiler alert!)

As I read through this passage, I began to smile because it became obvious why the Holy Spirit sent me here. It was so perfect, I

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had to add it to this book. God spoke to me saying, *I shut the mouths of lions, and I'll shut the mouths of your enemies, too! Daniel was delivered and you will be soon...*

Amen to that!

I pray the same for you as well. Whatever your *lion* — depression, a bully, a diagnosis, a former spouse, a prosecuting attorney — I'm here to tell you **they will not consume or devour you**. It may try to rip you apart, but it has no power over the great *I AM*. (Which we'll explain more of in a few chapters.)

You may feel trapped, or caged like Daniel. And sorry, you may have to wait it out like he did, but the morning is coming. Your lions will be conquered.

To conquer those lions, you have to face them head on. I get it, it's scary. Every time I even thought about my Chaos, I would begin to shake uncontrollably. The fear alone caused me so many sleepless nights and loss of appetite. My fear was unhealthy emotionally, spiritually, and definitely physically.

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No matter how much we want or beg to avoid our lions, we can't always do so. Daniel sure wasn't given an option. He just had to awkwardly wait it out with 'ole Simba staring him down all night. We want to rest in a palace, yet sometimes we are called to wait it out in the pit.

When I was in high school, I interned at a church. The church was big and scary at night. Some even said it was "haunted". I don't believe that, but the place did scare me at times.

One night in the summer, some of my friends and I were up there getting some things out of my office. We macho-men decided we'd take a trip to the Sanctuary and walk through with the lights off. This might not seem like such a big deal, but it was to us! We were all familiar with the rumors. I can't remember who walked in first or much about the situation. What I do remember though, was I stood near the front of the stage in the center of the room, no easy way to run out. (Looking back, this wasn't smart planning on my part.)

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As I looked toward the sound booth at the back of the room, I saw a human figure sitting there.

I squeaked (because I was unable to scream or speak), then I ran —almost pushing down one of my friends. Once I ran, my friends followed. When we all made it back to the office—*alive*—I told them what I saw. Half of us wanted to leave and never return, the others wanted to check it out.

We ended up checking it out.

Kids, don't try this at home...

We slowly and quietly walked toward the Sanctuary, each holding a weapon. By *weapon* I mean mops, brooms, and a mic stand. I was thinking, *this is how all the clueless people end up dead in horror movies...* And as we entered, we quickly turned on the Sanctuary lights to try and catch whatever/ whomever by surprise.

And then we saw it...

A ghost. A man. An alien.

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These were all things it was not. What we found was an ugly, brass lamp.

Disappointing, I know.

What I originally saw wasn't real, but my fear absolutely was. I will admit, I voted for leaving and never returning, but I am glad we confronted it. Yes, the outcome made me hate my inability to see in the dark, but it also put me at ease. It gave me a chance to see the object as it really was. This is the difference between light and dark. Darkness disturbs what's in front of us. Light brings truth to these scary imaginations.

In our *dens* with whatever our *lions* may be, darkness may cause uncontrollable fear—it may transform our simple lamps into scary aliens just chillin' in the back of a sanctuary like an episode of X-Files, but the Light of the world (Jesus) can help show you what is really there.

Whether it's a lion, a lamp, or a llama (random, I know...just needed a third "L" word to finish off my point); it is all powerless to God.

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Daniel 6:22 says, “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.””

(NIV)

I love this verse. Your enemies have no power over you! Their mouths will be shut; they will not consume you. All because you have *been found innocent before Him.*

How do I know this? Because this is why Jesus came to earth. We were all guilty and deserved punishment for our sin, but He took it upon Himself. Yes, the Blameless took *our* sin to the cross; and our verdict?

Not Guilty.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:23 NASB

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The Adventures of Luke Bryan

Growing up in the south should mean that I'm used to bugs, animals of all kinds, dirt roads, and everything else ever mentioned in a country song by Luke Bryan. But I'm quite the opposite. I love adventure, but I also love air-conditioning. I love it so much that I think we should have a day off to celebrate the inventor of such an amazing machine. So, for me, summers are a time to "hunker-down" inside, not ride dirt roads with the windows down thinkin' bout tractors!

My friends, though, convinced me once (just once) to go "floatin' down the river" with them in kayaks. The adventurous side of me was ecstatic. The part of my brain that enjoys comfort was not at all enthusiastic. And it only got worse when one of my friends gave me some helpful tips: Don't let your kayak float under the tree branches with moss because a water moccasin might fall out of the tree in your lap. And if you see an alligator, stay calm. It *should* float on by...

What!?! Where are we kayaking?

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At first, I thought he was joking, but then I watched him pack a pistol “just in case.” I didn’t know whether to pee my pants or write my will! Or both!

But because I’m a guy, I tried not to show fear as we began this journey to our possible deaths. The first half of the trip went smoothly.

We were all having a great time until we encountered a fallen tree in our path. (And no, I don’t know if it made a sound...)

We were on a part of the river that was very narrow; land was close on both sides. So, when we came up on this tree that fell, it was laying across the whole width of the river. The only option was going over it.

We had been on the river for about two hours, and I was still alive so I decided to man-up and go first. You know, show them how it’s done!

I shifted my kayak parallel to the tree, got out onto the log, and pulled it over to the other side. As I had one foot in the kayak and one

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on the tree, my friend decided to point out that there was a spider by my foot.

He said: “Look at this spider, dude.”

I heard: “Retreat! This spider is gonna eat us all!”

Maybe that’s an exaggeration, but it’s my story to tell. So, with one foot in and one on the tree, I looked back quickly yelling, “W-where?!” And that’s when I fell into the water.

My kayak was tipped over, taking on water like the Titanic; and I was flailing-about getting ready to meet Peter at the Pearly Gates.

I hollered out, “Grayson, help!” as I continued doggy-paddling to stay above the water.

Then—between his hysterical fits of laughter—Grayson calmly said, “Bro, stand up.”

It took a good twenty seconds to process what he had just told me. And then I obeyed. I quickly found out that the water wasn’t even four feet deep....so embarrassing!

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Up to that part of the trip, I was scared, but I at least felt a little safe being in the kayak. When I was “drowning”, fear took over completely. All at once I thought I was going to drown, be bitten by a deadly spider, have a water moccasin attack me, and then an alligator swallow me whole. But Grayson brought me back to reality...*Stand up.*

Peter too had an exciting experience with getting out of a boat. The story is found in *Matthew 14:22-32*. If you don't know the story, I'll sum it up for you:

The Disciples were on a boat when a big storm began. They were being tossed all around and I'm sure getting sea sick. Then in the midst of the storm, Jesus shows up walking on the water, making all of the Disciples poop their pants in fear (my educated guess). But Jesus told them, “It is I, don't be afraid.” Peter steps forward and says, “If it's You, then let me come walk on water with You!” Peter did. But not too long in to it, he began noticing the storm around him and he sank. But Jesus reached out and picked Peter up.

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I always assumed that once Jesus showed up, the wind and waves were calm, but that's not the case. The storm continued even as Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on water.

(Most people give Peter a hard time for sinking, and their points are solid. He had just seen Jesus feed over 5000 people with just two fish and five loaves, among many other miracles that revealed how capable and powerful Jesus is. But so did the others, yet Peter was the only one willing to take a step out of the boat. So give the guy a break!)

Once Peter stepped out of the boat, Chaos surrounded him—stealing his attention from Jesus—and it caused him to sink like a *rock*.

(I'm sure, as he sank, he screamed like a little girl; just as I did.) He let his fear take over his focus on Jesus. He began looking at the size of the Chaos around him instead of focusing ahead toward the One who has the ability to heal, provide, and do other miracles Peter had witnessed up to this point!

Peter gets out of the boat, but fear of the wind and waves made him start to sink. Our Chaos can make us forget reality at times as we try

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not to drown (or get eaten by alligators). Our Chaos can cause us to sink because contrary to Luke Bryan, rain isn't always a "good thing". But let me help bring your focus back...Stand up! I hope this will help open your eyes to see that it's not really as bad as you thought. It definitely isn't when you stand up and look ahead toward Jesus.

I heard someone once say, "The secret to life is: Fall down seven times...and get up eight."

Don't let fear paralyze you. Don't let Chaos drown you. Don't let the enemy swallow you whole. Don't let your present circumstances define you. Even if it's your seventh time falling or sinking, stand up. Stay focused ahead. He's bigger than the waves. He's stronger than any alligator. The struggle is real, but so is my God!

Underline this or highlight this: **The magnitude of your storm is nothing compared to the Power of Jesus!**

2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." (NIV)

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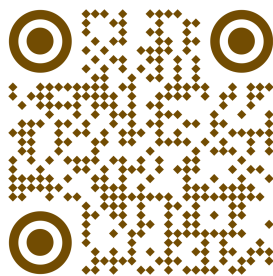
That same power that makes us be *more than conquerors* is the same power keeping you above the wind and waves of your Chaos. And it's the same power living inside of you today. (Check out *Romans 8:11*.)

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10 NIV

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