

LIVING IN THE DARK

A 20-DAY PRACTICE GUIDE

LEARNING TO REMAIN HOPEFUL
IN THE FACE OF THE
HOPELESS

C. HOPE WERNER

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Introduction

ALL ABOUT

C. HOPE

Having arrived in the mid-life season of living, Cassi is more convinced than ever about the shortness of life, the need to live with intention, and the gift of seeing life as equal parts mess + beauty.

She is always looking for the bright spots within her every day living and finds photography and writing help her make sense of life.

Cassi hunts hope in the mountains of North Carolina alongside her husband and any of her four children who haven't left home yet.



LIVING IN

THE

DARK

When life gets overwhelming and you feel as if everything is swirling around you, when pain and hardship seem never ending, hope can be hard to find. The tunnel of darkness stretching before you can cause you to believe moving forward is impossible and midnight is the new normal.

Out of some hopeless places I write about my journey of remaining hopeful. The words you will read in this ebook are the raw reality of walking with a God who isn't always seen, in places I'd never choose to go. Maybe I haven't felt pain as deep as yours, or maybe I have. Either way, pain on any level hurts. The way the pain arrives doesn't matter as much as the reality that it does, usually wrapped inside hopelessness. The dark can be terrifying, but I've discovered what you do in the dark makes a world of difference to how you come through the dark.

Having originally been shared on my blog throughout a month's time, I have since edited those posts to fit the format of this eBook for use as a daily reading of encouragement with a little moment of contemplation at the end. Will you journey with me through the words given to me from desperate places?

I pray you'll discover just enough light to help you keep choosing hope in the face of your hopeless.

Seeking Light,

Cassi

2

Spreading Out the Blanket

Providing Context



If we are going to share our hearts together for the next little while, I feel like I need to spread a blanket out, so to speak, to provide a place to sit and talk from.

My husband and I have been serving in camp ministry at Whisper Mountain Youth Camp in the mountains of North Carolina for the past sixteen years. We are part of a small team of people who proclaim Christ to teens and their adult leaders through summer camp and year-round weekend retreats. Many think we are living the dream, and in some ways we might be, but the work is hard and exhausting; the battlefield is covered in blood, sweat and tears as we provide a place for people to escape their noise in order to hear the personal whisper of God.

My sharing in this eBook comes from the perspective of one who follows Jesus, and from a time when our family walked nine long months through the desperation of my husband's mental illness and the spiritual warfare that came with it. There were no easy answers and the journey gave us no reason to believe we would ever be normal again. We had three (of our four) kids during this time aged 15, 12 and 6. Walking them through the dark while trying to show them the goodness of God proved to be a hands-on faith experience that is being used to shape them even now.

This eBook isn't about the mental illness, but is more about the walk through the darkness his illness brought upon our family. Being at the end of the dark tunnel now makes it easier to see just how economical God is in all He does. One person's struggle becomes another person's point of growth -- finding a message in the mess.

May you find Him here, among the words He helped me pen, that you may know Him and make Him known.

3

Articles of Hope

20 Days of Living in the Dark

ARTICLE

01

CROCKPOT OR MICROWAVE?

Life is anything but stable as the faults shift and slide in the undercurrents of time. I had been sitting in the grass, soaking in the beautiful spring day, trying to calm the tension that the approaching summer camp season always brings.

In my journal I had written, *The salve of the Creator's touch of beauty puts rhythm back in chaos. I could lay in the grass forever, lulled to rest by the songs of nature, wrapped in the breeze of spring.* Not one month later my journal held these words, *The past two weeks have been leaning toward a nightmare we can't wake up from.*



And all while summer camp is going on. It's too much. For everyone.

Have you ever felt like you were in a microwave, subjected to a quick and intense heat? Circumstances change so quickly and drastically you find yourself trying to walk a straight line after spinning with your head on top of a baseball bat.

Or maybe you've felt more like you've entered a crock-pot, subjected to a slow, steady heat. Circumstances don't make you dizzy, but they sure do wear you down. Maybe sometimes it feels like both.

That's where our family was: we started in the microwave but moved to the crock-pot for what felt like would be forever. Our souls craved stability, rest and safety, but how in the world could we find that in the center of such instability?

I was contemplating this very question when I landed in a puddle of truth that instantly (and divinely) quieted my heart: He [my Father God] will be the stability of our times (Isaiah 33:6). What assurance for the unstable times we were living in.

We discover a deep sense of *woo-sah* (translation: *deep breath, I'm okay*) when we allow this truth to resonate with our hearts.

Read slowly:

God Almighty

- the One who spoke worlds into existence
 - the One who holds the worlds in His hands
 - the One whose thoughts and ways are bigger and more than ours
 - the One who sees and is working inside the whole picture
- will be the stability we cannot find anywhere else.

No crock-pot or microwave experience can ever remove us from those Father God hands, no matter how much spinning out of control there is.

When you and I pull in close to Him, we have the privilege of feeling His breath on our faces as He brings us into the very place of safety we crave.

TAKE A MINUTE

Read Isaiah 33:6 for yourself. What do you feel needs stabilizing in your own life right now? Do you believe God will do it?

ARTICLE

02

QUIT SQUIRMING

Human nature pushes away from pain and negative feelings of any kind. *I have a little headache?* Give me some aspirin. *I have a hangnail?* Give me some cream. *I face continual rejection?* Give me a blade. *I can't shake the guilt?* Give me a drink. *My life is a mess?* Give me...

We run from pain and discomfort, in the big and small ways, as desperately as a rabbit escaping a fox. We look for ways out of whatever is not fun or doesn't feel good in the moment.



I remember sitting in the driver's seat of our van feeling completely overwhelmed with the set of circumstances I was in. Normal pressures are enough in life without adding something as heavy as I was facing into the mix. I couldn't turn any direction in my life without facing extreme difficulty and pain. I wanted to escape somehow, I wanted God to say the word and make everything all right again. I didn't feel like doing what I had to do. In full tantrum style, my inward spirit flipped out, squirmed and wriggled and fought the very things I could do nothing about.

Something I learned a very long time ago proved helpful in this time as well. ***Don't run, just feel.*** Feel the struggle. Feel the hurt. Feel the fear. Feel the loss. Feel the hopelessness. Feeling doesn't equal death. Feeling equals absorbing life. It means our hearts are pumping, our mind is functioning, and our place in time is real.

Escaping a feeling means escaping the pathway to peace beyond our understanding. Escaping a feeling means missing out on the greater depths my heart would never choose but a joy I'd never otherwise know. Feelings are a gift when filtered through wisdom and faith.

Often times we are more committed to relieving our pain instead of allowing our pain to struggle with the character and purposes of God.”
~ Jim Kallam



If you are facing hard things right now, try to resist the innate need to squirm away. Holding still and feeling the hard is your passage to the greater things of God: the things you never knew to wish for but more wonderful than you ever could imagine.

TAKE A MINUTE

Sit with and allow the amazing truth of Ephesians 3:20-21 to soak deep inside your hurting places.

ARTICLE

03

A BATTLE FOR HOPE

Like so many days, I often find myself surrounded by both the hope-filled and the hopeless. We live every day in the tension of the beautiful and the ugly. With light is darkness, with joy is sorrow, with laundry is abundance, with morning is coffee. Within every mess there is some lining of beauty, if we are willing to look around for it.

Fall is my absolute favorite season. Living in Western North Carolina with its breathtaking autumns feels like a marriage from heaven! We get along so good. On this particular year, I wasn't enjoying fall much at all. Our days were beyond difficult with managing my husband's behaviors and struggles.



I remember one fall day being particularly heavy with devastating hardships – stifling, dark and unending. There was a heaviness working hard to tip my heart toward hopelessness, and it would have been easy to succumb to. But we aren't called to the easy (something I admittedly get pouty about!). I needed to grab hold of some normalcy, something hopeful. I opened the door and stepped outside and tried to remember what it felt like to be normal.

When I looked for it, I remember the day sort of screaming glory – the breeze, the light, and the colors all worked an explosion of beauty that stirred my heart toward joy. A beauty lifting my spirit and cheering me on: Keep going, there's life here still. Keep going.

In these times of warring between life and death, struggle and joy, purposing our minds and hearts on the steadfast things of God tips us in the direction of joy and light. God's grace redeems, restores, and repositions us, leading us into His glorious light. The choice can feel impossible when you're soul weary, but the hardest things are the things worth doing.

Drift on hope, soak in His presence, receive His love. Friend, remain steadfast. Purpose in your heart and mind to pursue the steadfast love of a compassionate God. The battle for hope may seem long, but every ounce of it is worth it.

TAKE A MINUTE

Sit with the truth of these words to help tip you toward hope:

Psalm 116:5 | Psalm 34:22 | John 1:16

ARTICLE

04

LET THEM OFF

Often, hard things will result in harder things because other people are involved. Being angered by this reality is pretty normal because it feels insensitive and unfair for one more thing to be added on top of an already enormous and impossible load. Most people have the best intentions, but in their ignorance or lack of understanding to your ~~and~~ situation they can bring greater pain or hardship. It becomes vital for us to let other people off the hook when it comes to understanding you and your painful circumstances.



We are wise to remember there is ever only One who knows us in the depths and understands our ins and outs and loves us fiercely still. May our souls find safety and rest in Him alone.

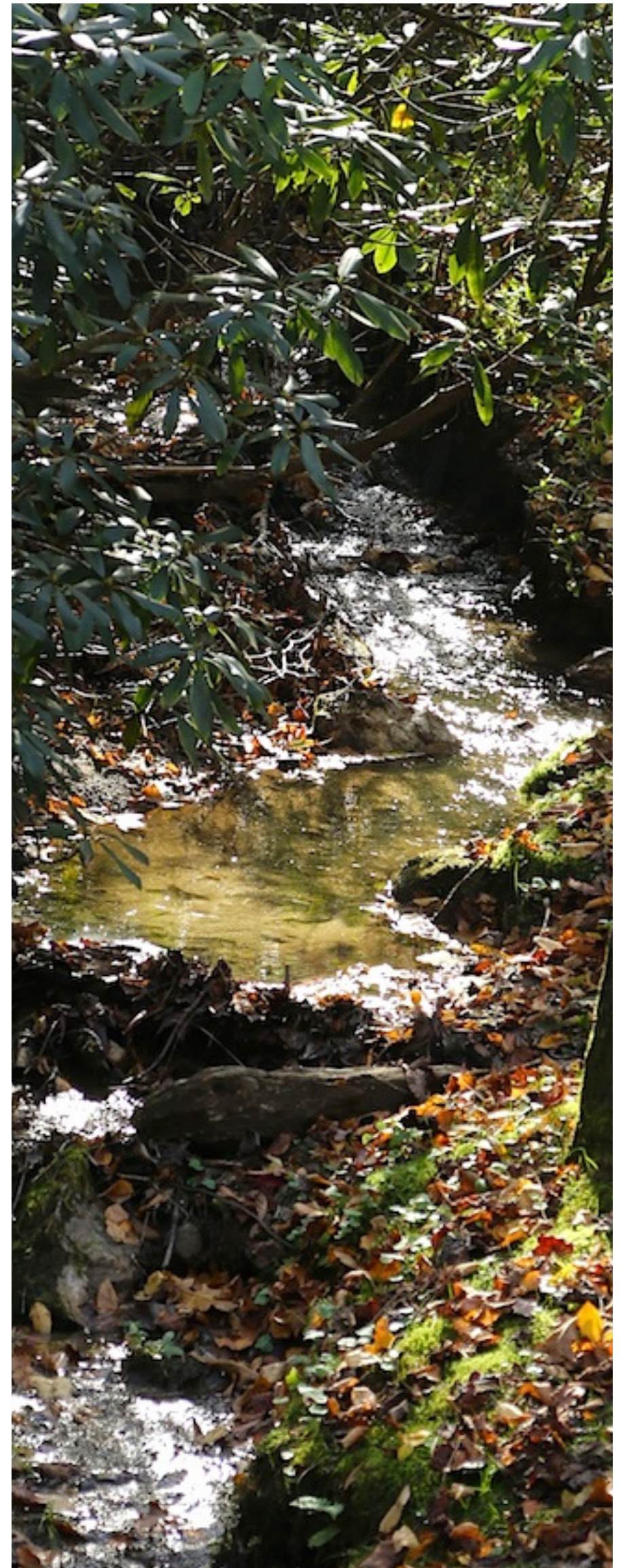
TAKE A MINUTE

Finding a place of safety in being understood and seen feels impossible sometimes. Crawl inside these truths for a minute: Isaiah 40:28-29 and Psalm 33:13-22.

Even when we are committed to choosing hope in the face of hopeless things, we will still have those days where finding and sharing hope feels impossible. I remember feeling the impossible task of showing up to my blog one day during this time. I had the feeling of a messenger walking through a sea of quicksand in rain boots to deliver a package all tattered and torn. Each step sunk me deeper, sucking me under, swallowing me whole. I felt surrounded by the humanly impossible, willing a bridge to appear out of thin air, but sure I would have no way to come out alive on the other side.

Have you ever felt so hopeless and desperate? If you're human, it's likely you know what I'm talking about. While sinking in these sands one morning, I found an anchor of hope cast my way, unlocking the bridge to lead me to solid ground again.

I had picked up a little devotional and was met with a challenging question: would I be willing to follow wherever God leads me, whether or not I knew what was ahead, but gladly willing because of Who I was following? Do I really believe my richest blessings are found in God? Do I doubt these blessings to be real because they are out of sight now? Walking by faith means I'm willing to follow without seeing these blessings. To follow doesn't mean to ignore the world and the pain it brings, but that I'm entrusting myself to the Shepherd of my Soul, the One able to lead me.



In the moments of reading those words, they sounded spoken to my heart, as if they were never written to millions of people in a book, but meant only for my situation. God is personal like that. Hearing Him, being reminded of His vast power and with-me presence hushed the frantic struggle inside. He knows what lies ahead. That is enough.

TAKE A MINUTE

A simple way to keep truth and hope literally in front of your face is to write out Scripture on paper and tape them up around the home (kitchen cabinets, mirrors, etc).

Hang or mark these Scriptures to hold on to:
2 Corinthians 5:7 | 1 Peter 2:25 | Isaiah 41:10

In moments when God seems silent and absent, turning to His Word can seem to add to our pain and emptiness because of the nothing we sometimes find there. Having no other option, risking just a little more, and going anyways, can be the most reassuring moment ever. Finding myself in such a place, I risked asking God to please just assure me He was there.



Fanning the pages in no particular order, half-expecting nothing again, my eyes fell to these words:

**God gives life to the dead and calls into being
that which does not exist.
(Romans 4:17)**

The assurance was instant, just the breath of heavenly air I needed to keep on going. All those places that seem dead or too far-gone or even non-existent in our lives – these are the places God gives life to.

He speaks life into existence (Genesis 1). A God who brings life about by the utterance of His mouth is a God most powerful, the God I want to follow, even if it means sometimes waiting for Him in the dark.

TAKE A MINUTE

Remembering our place in the whole of God's plan and His power within that plan can help us stay in the right perspective. Psalm 33 is a great start to finding your place in the wait.

ARTICLE

07

THE SHIRT TALES OF HOPE

(The following picture has nothing to do with the message I want to share today. Sometimes we just need to see beauty to remember what it looks like. A sort of deep breath so we can plunge back into whatever depths we find ourselves swimming in right now.)



This morning I noticed something. Once we grab hold of the shirt tales of hope and we cling with everything in us, no matter how rocky the ride becomes, our hope grip strengthens. Almost as if the capsule was placed in water and a swelling brought forth a prize from within. It seems our tiniest move toward hope births a bigger hope, the longer we hold on.

Friends, do you realize how wonderful a gift this is? Resilience you didn't know you had surfaces, a defiance toward all that's trying to steal your hope roars awake. What held you in the dark before shatters an entrance into glorious and spacious light now.

I don't come to you today as someone speaking vaguely of things I know nothing about. I come as a girl, wandering in a dark wilderness, walking on a path that only opens up with each faith step I set down. I'm familiar with the dark, but I live in the light. Whatever you face, no matter how hopeless, no matter how dark, grab a hold of the shirt tails of hope. You won't be sorry.

TAKE A MINUTE

Look around the space where you are currently sitting or take a walk outside and look for things of beauty. Touch them, smell them, hold them. Take slow deep breaths. Ground yourself. Then give thanks.

ARTICLE

08

KEEP FLEXING HOPE



Sometimes our climb feels straight up and never ending. Just as our hope muscles are trembling and threatening to give out, we defiantly reach up for the next hold, moving a little closer to the finish. The climb is slow and painful, but we keep reaching up.

No matter how long you've been climbing for or how rugged the terrain, keep flexing your hope. When you're sitting on top of the impossible, your joy will overwhelm any memory of pain.

**To purpose your reach up is to purpose your hope forward.
To hope is continuing to climb even when you feel the burn.**

TAKE A MINUTE

What is one practical way you can keep flexing hope today? When you think of what it is, go do it. *Realize this strength is coming from the help of your God and give Him thanks for such a gift.*

He makes me lie down in green pastures. The Good Shepherd will lead, but what about when His leading seems to rear-end us into more impossibilities? Is He still good? Is He really leading?

I had found myself following where He was leading. I sought Him. I begged Him to make a way. And a place of hope was opened. I followed: unsure, cautiously, fearful, bone weary, but I followed. About midway through this journey toward greater hope, the brakes slammed, tires squealed and we rear-ended into greater impossibilities.



As I climbed up out of the wreckage, the world was spinning and pain seared my chest until I could hardly breathe. Hope crashed. The fragile, clinging to, won't-let-go-but-can-hardly-hold-on hope lay shattered on the cold, hard reality that was my life. How can this be?

God, You've led me here to this? What are you thinking? What are you doing? What am I supposed to do now? Following You hurts.too.much. Father God, please show me You are here, show me You haven't abandoned me. Right there, in the midst of my brokenness, He whispered in His gentle and personal way (the way His sheep are familiar with), I AM your hope. Not the place I was taking you, not the place I will lead you to still, not my provision. I AM.



Air slowly seeped back into my lungs as a quieting relief washed over me. The realization dawned on me – He was right. He *alone* was my hope. And I wasn't alone. Feeling began to creep back into the numb places revealing a raw pain and weariness too great for words. The way still wasn't clear. BUT, if God is as faithful as He says He is, if He truly is the Good Shepherd, if He seriously works all things for our good, then every single impossibility, place of brokenness, hope-crashed, rear-ending only leads us to more of Him. More of Him = life abundant. Maybe not instantly, but always in the end. Is His way really as wrong as it feels then or does it just turn out to be different than we expected?

TAKE A MINUTE

Some of the truths from this article can be found in these passages:
John 10:14 | I Corinthians 1:9 | I Peter 4:19

ARTICLE

10

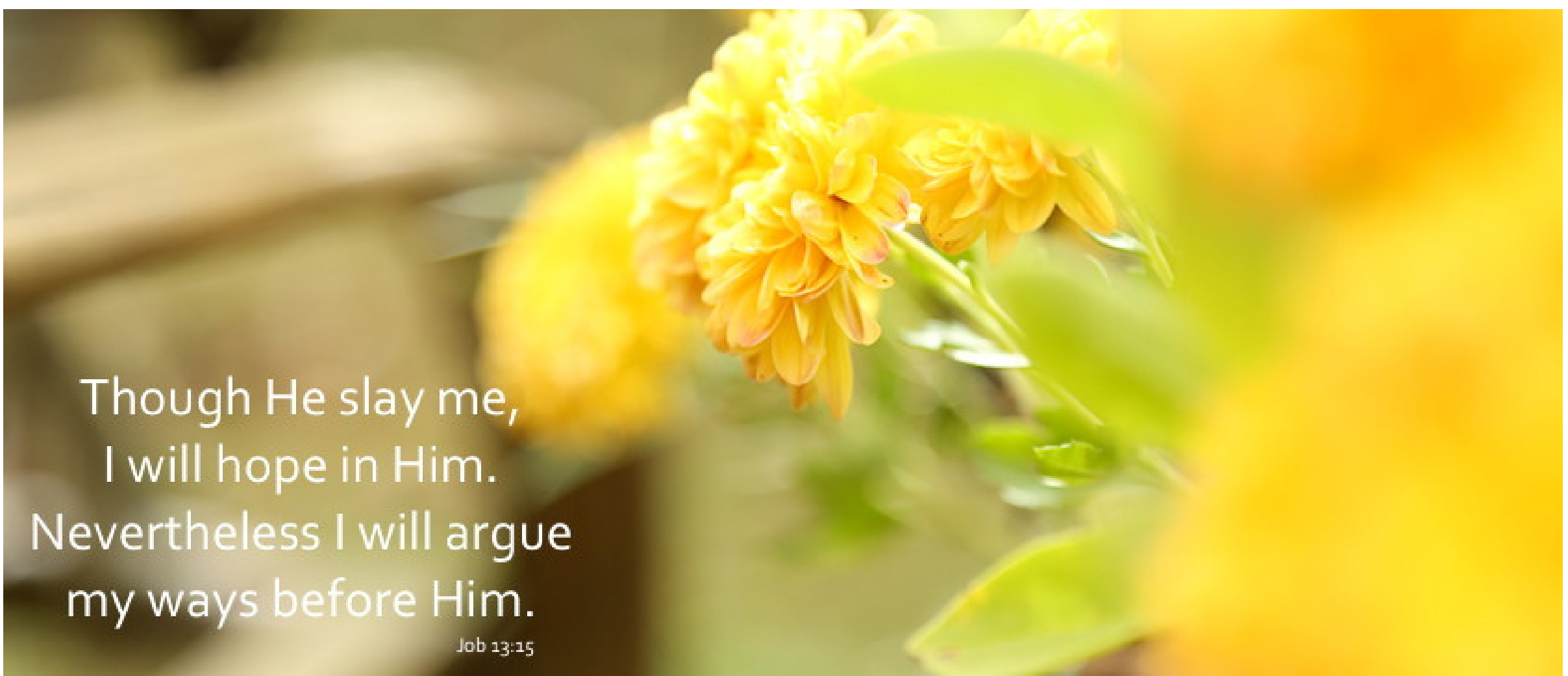
MOVE AROUND INSIDE HOPE

I love the surrender from Job here:

**“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.”**

(Job 13:15)

What I love more is his willingness to still approach God with the junk he faced. A relationship with Almighty God is a pretty radical, amazing, life-altering thing. That we can bring our junk to God – argue our ways before Him – is a gift we refuse too often. How stale to run from God rather than wrestle with God about the hard things in life. Enter into His hope, but be sure to move around inside of that!



TAKE A MINUTE

Have you felt safe enough to approach God with all you carry? I mean ALLL of it? Your raw, unfiltered emotion and thoughts and questions. He's God. Do you think your worst thoughts and feelings are going to scare Him off? Do you think He won't have an answer to your questions? You will find the process to be quite helpful. Use a journal or literally cry out to Him. He wants this with you. | Psalm 62:8

ARTICLE

11

A COVERING OF HOPE

Hope is the little verb demanding our full attention to believe for what can't be seen. It's an intentional spraying of faith to cover the thing being built.

If we hope for what we don't see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

(Romans 8:25)

Lather your day, your circumstances, and your moments with a covering of hope today. His purpose will prevail, His goodness will be known, and His presence will be real.



TAKE A MINUTE

You have to work at hope sometimes. Perseverance to wait for what you don't see takes sweat, determination, grit. Take a break from your mind's broken record and close your eyes to "see" what you haven't been seeing. Imagine what your life will look like when the waiting is done. There's no magic in this, but your mind needs to refresh, to see the goal of what you're believing for. Now pray for the God of all hope to keep covering you as you keep waiting eagerly for His work to be accomplished in your life.



The new bride within me never could have imagined the fierce testing of vows in the journey ahead. I stood there dressed in white, feeling like the princess I'd always wanted to be. I promised the man who won my heart I would be with him in sickness and health, for better or worse, 'til death do us part. He promised the same to me. My love for him felt strong, sure, immovable.

Sixteen years later, my prince and I were facing our most impossible situation yet. The "worse" had arrived. The doing of life together didn't feel quite as true and a dark sheet covered a bright future. Those vows we confidently spoke then were pushed to the breaking point now. What do we do when our young love made promises that feel too hard to keep now?

We purpose in our hearts to keep those promises...even when the house we've been building together seems beyond repair or too far gone. On the worst of days, in the darkest of nights, a grand temptation to abandon comes knocking on our broken down door. When we answer, will we leave behind the hopeless in order to pursue a greater comfort we feel we deserve? Will we sidestep our promises to embrace our desires? Or will we close the door on temptation and step out to the back porch of another way.

Though the tall grasses lead to wilderness as far as our eye can see, will we hold fast our promises to walk the path less traveled? When we brave the unknown, when we become willing to keep our marriage vows, we are led to One who comes to rebuild and restore all that has broken down. He is the Master Craftsman of great renown, who makes beauty from nothing, creating a home of joy from the shambles of sorrow.

TAKE A MINUTE

Allow these words to cover you today:

Psalm 80:7 | Hebrews 3:4 | Isaiah 44:6-8

ARTICLE

13

3 WAYS TO

SURVIVE THE HARD OF LIFE

When you don't feel like celebrating, but life makes you show up anyway. When all you want to do is curl up alone, but demands keep you surrounded. When you can't put into words the ache inside, but questions flow constantly. When you can't think passed this moment, but plans need to be made. When you wish you could shut your eyes and wake to unicorns and rainbows, but all you see are dungeons and dragons.

When your world is falling apart:

1. Breathe
2. Become Thankful
3. Brew a latte

In the breathing, we allow the pain to settle.

In the becoming thankful, we lift our eyes to a greater work stirring beneath the pain.

In the brewing (and then sipping), we steady our hearts to wait for the work to be known. Be intentional to live your life fully today, no matter your circumstances.



TAKE A MINUTE

While sipping your drink of choice, hold your cup with two hands so you really become present in that moment. Then list out loud to yourself, the things you are thankful for today. Dig deep. There's good there.



All day I couldn't shake a scene from a movie I had seen when I was young. (I have no idea what the movie even was.) A patient lay dying in a hospital bed. Each day she would stare out the window at a tree whose leaves were changing with the seasons. With each season, her health grew progressively worse. Each day more and more leaves would drift away on the breeze, a little more of her hope slipping away with each one. When the final leaf let go, the patient died.

A stellar start to the day, right? For the life of me, I couldn't get the scene out of my head as I watched the mountains succumb to seasonal changes. Some days have felt much like the last, lone leaf fighting hard to cling to the branch but ended up being carried away with the breeze. Other days, I've gotten lost in the season's beauty, in the leaves doing their radiant work, in witnessing piles of leaves dancing across the lawn. When the last leaf finally does fall this season, the radiance will seem lost. By all appearances, the forest will seem to have died.



Watching those leaves dance, seeing the movie scene reeling through my mind, a hope grew inside my heart: a hope that sees both the radiance and the falling away. Within the rhythm of seasons, there is a moving toward something deeper and quieter, a preparing for something better and stronger. When times seem to represent a death of one thing, it's really just making room for the growth of another. No matter what's taking place all around us, we can rest in the light of God's presence. Resting there brings the hope. The hope allows life to take root a little deeper than before.

TAKE A MINUTE

Nature has a way of connecting us to God. Find a peaceful spot outdoors to sit and breathe slow. Find some light to absorb if you can. Observe and notice what's around you. This doesn't have to take long, just a few minutes will make a huge difference. God meets us in His garden.

Read these Scriptures:

John 8:12 | John 1:5 | Psalm 27:1 | I John 1:5

ARTICLE

15

THE ANSWER THAT

FEELS ALL WRONG



They were terrified, struggling to stay alive, doing all they knew to do, all that seemed right and logical to do but seeing hope of their survival sinking further away. They were desperate and they were angry, but they weren't giving up.

How could you do this? the question was begged. Then What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us? The storm was getting increasingly stormy -- that place when it feels it will never end and exhaustion from staying alive feels heavier than a cruise ship's anchor fastened around the neck.

The answer came in what I imagine to be a flat, hardened, stoic tone. Let me go. But that seemed preposterous to those keeping the ship afloat. The opposite of what should be done. The very wrong answer. But when the ship can't really be kept afloat much longer a desperate call to the Master of the Seas for the okay is sounded. Lord, do we really let him go? Will we be in the wrong if we do this? The inquiry led to the okay and they threw him into the heart of the storm. And the sea stopped its raging.



Other people's choices always affect other people's lives. When on the side of being affected, life gets complicated quickly. The complication leaves us depleted and facing the overwhelming truth that life is not fair. We ask God how He can do this, what can we do to find the calm again? Continuing in the swelling storm that is not of our doing brings a panic and overwhelming hopelessness raging inside. What can we do?

The answer comes softly and feels all wrong, but it's what is spoken: *Let go.*

Not in the sense that you stop caring or stop being involved. Some circumstances are impossible to escape. But the inner, desperate attempts to have everything made right must stop. A release from the work and the struggle and the grip in order to find a trust in God to streamline the chaos as He sees fit. There may be an ocean of fear in the letting go, but the raging will cease and a vessel of grace will be appointed to bring about His work in deep places.

TAKE A MINUTE

Today's thoughts are inspired by Jonah 1:10-15. Take a few minutes to read through this story.

ARTICLE

16

I WANTED THIS?



The song was playing in the car when it hit me. Did I ask for this? Those lyrics I had full-heartedly sang at a worship service, those words poured out in heart surrender to my God, that prayer:

I wanted God's Spirit to lead me where I'd never been before, wherever He might call me. I wanted my faith to be strengthened and I wanted to live in the presence of my Savior. I genuinely sang surrender to wherever God would call me, if He'd just keep my head above water, because I proclaimed whole-heartedly He was mine and I was His.

Here I am facing the ugly of life, having to trust without borders, going so deep I cannot wander or I'd be undone, having my faith be made stronger.

I wanted this. But I never wanted the pathway that led me here.

Sadly, pain is the force that tends to move my stubborn heart into becoming what God has in mind and moving me where He wants me to be.

In the moments when I go forward and backward, turn to the right and left but cannot find God; in the moments when I feel alone and abandoned and hopelessness works hard to cover me -- these are the moments I can be assured He knows the way I take. My soul can truly find rest in Him because I am His. When He has tried me, I will come forth as gold.

TAKE A MINUTE

Read Job 23:8-10.

Song referenced is called Oceans by Hillsong

ARTICLE

17

FAITH ON FOOT



There I stood at the corner of Dread and Fear. The curb was the safer place to stay, for sure, but I was being called to from across the street. There weren't any other options, I had to cross the intersection. But I was terrified. Of. So. Many. Things. How could I be sure my God would really be with me each step of the way? How could this impossible thing turn out even remotely good?

The knot in my stomach tightened, my heart trembled. I had to cross the street -- alone. Determining to stop thinking and just start moving, I stepped my foot down off the curb and went forward.

The first step off the curb was the step of faith required of me to see God in a powerful way. Peter met Jesus on the water because he stepped out of the boat, the boy saw a move of God because he stepped out of the crowd to deliver his lunchbox, the man's daughter was healed because he left his house to search out Jesus. I encountered God in an unexpected place because I was willing to believe God would be with me, somehow, some way.

Life requires a crazy faith sometimes, but mostly life just requires a faith on foot.

What are you being called to step out toward today? The biggest moves of God in our lives, the most real and powerful encounters with Him, sometimes follow our tiniest steps of faith into streets of scary places.

TAKE A MINUTE

Allow Jesus' words all those years ago to speak into your situation now.
Read Mark 5:36 | Matthew 14:28-33 | John 6:8-13



Leaning against the porch railing yesterday, I was swept up in the beauty of fall. The breeze was amazing, the sun was perfectly warm and magical. The leaves dancing on limbs made me feel light hearted. Fall invigorates me -- favorites tend to do that! The fall air was clearing my head and with the clearing came a remembrance I wanted to share with you here.

When miles of swirling winds and torrential downpours filled the skies and my feet were muddied down with fears and heartache and my shoulders were yolked with the weight of unbearable things, I had a halting thought. *What if this were my last assignment in life?* In my experience, "what ifs" are usually bad ideas, but this one came wrapped in a bow.

If I knew when my final day came, wouldn't my choices, attitude, and perspective be effected? What if my final purpose on earth was to make it through this storm? Something gave rise within me; an overwhelming need to finish well consumed me.

When we acknowledge our limited days on earth, an urgency sweeps over us, helping us live more intentionally. The gift of "what if" unwrapped that day was the gift of hope in disguise. I dared to believe there would be an end to the storm and I found the courage to finish well.

Stay the course, my friend. Unwrap the hope finishing well brings.

TAKE A MINUTE

Read Psalm 90:12. In this wisdom, what do you need to dig deep with today to see things through?

Read 2 Timothy 4:7 -- it was never going to be easy, but see the vision of finishing strong from this verse and ask your God to let it be so.

ARTICLE

19

WHEN THE VOID THROBS



Being caught in the world between our normal and our current pain can make us feel boxed in by a surreal fog that won't lift. As badly as a freshly mishammered thumb, the void we face and reface day in and day out throbs mercilessly. A whole world of kind, Christianese words cannot be strung together to offer anything resembling hope. Well-meaning answers and solutions laid out across the table of conversation cannot begin to soothe. Even God's Word feels wearisome at times and His presence gone. What's left? How can hope be found when all that is typical doesn't fit?

Hope at this point becomes a choice. When there is no evidence, no salve, no anything to point the way to escaping the box trapping us, we decide to believe a way will be made. Drowning the pain weakens us further. Sinking in the pain suffocates. Lifting our eyes to who we know God to be awakens a faith just desperate enough to see a move of God.

TAKE A MINUTE

Lifting our eyes is key. Allow the greatness of God to come into vision. Dwell on the reality of Isaiah 40:26.



We were entering the sixth month of facing hopelessness in our family. One would think by then, something would have changed, broken through, shifted to a better place. For us it didn't seem to be the case. Lord knows I thought things would be better by then. What am I supposed to do amidst the terrible broken record that is my life? Waking up each day to the same monsters, the same pile of poo gets old, you know? I know you know. I'm not alone here. How long can we keep facing hard stuff?

Every.single.time I start to waver in my hope, God returns me to the place He started with me: *"Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today...The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent."* (Exodus 14:14) I can't tell you how many times He personally led me here or sent others to remind me (*when they had no idea it was "my place"*).

Friends, it doesn't matter what we each face in this life or for how long it drags out -- God is with us. Can we say that together out loud and slowly? *God. Is. With. Us.*

He wants to bring about a redemptive and glorious work only He can accomplish. I'll never understand the why, but I'd rather stand by and watch Him flex His muscles anyway, because what He accomplishes for me, for us, can't compare to our feeble attempts.

Hanging on to all we know God to be opens up the door to our seeing more of God than we already know of Him. His heart is for us to know Him and believe Him. The circumstances, impossibilities, failures, losses, whatever we face can move us toward a place of hope because they move us toward Him. He *will* accomplish for us.

TAKE A MINUTE

If you are still walking through hopeless things, do you find yourself moving toward God? No matter what circumstances may be saying to you, do you really believe His heart is *for* you? We have an enemy who would like to convince you otherwise. What will you believe?

We each have to decide for ourselves where we will cling. I'd like to advocate for you to cling to the truth of the Bible while you wait for Him to accomplish His good. What one truth is He speaking to you right now? Fix your mind, direct your heart there.

4

Conclusion

Treasure at the End



Life can feel like pushing up through dreadful places as we face impossibilities, pressures, and mounding worries. Standing, living and thriving feel overrated. Living Water becomes the game changer, all balled up on outstretched arms, dripping into those whose desert voids cry out for the satisfying presence of the personal God.

He unfurls the life within drooping hearts and awakens the color in blackened places. While the world searches for the treasure at the end of a rainbow, the thrivers know hope is the treasure discovered at the end of ourselves. At the end of ourselves is the gate to greener pastures of life in Jesus. Those dreadful places we face become the pathway along quiet waters, to more of everything our hearts thirst for. Luck has nothing to do with it. Hope is a thing grown.



Going forward, decide to grow hope in your own life. Abundance will come. May God be an ever present help as you continue to believe Him.

STAY IN TOUCH

Nearly ten years have past since these words were written. Cassi continues to pursue and share hope on her blog. Her husband Shaun has now begun sharing his story and together they are working to create resources like these to help those affected by Depression & Anxiety.

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