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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Guthrie, Nancy.

Holding on to hope : drawn by suffering to the heart of God / Nancy Guthrie.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8423-6418-8

1. Suffering—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Bible. O.T. Job—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 3. Guthrie, Nancy. I. Title.

BV4909.G88 2002

248.8'6—dc21

2002000711

Printed in the United States of America

06 05 04 03 02

7 6 5 4

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LOSS

Two weeks after the neighbor's house burned down, I gave birth to a daughter we named Hope. We had planned on that name for years for a daughter, but I never could have dreamed how meaningful it would become.

The doctors were immediately concerned by several “small” problems evident at birth—Hope had club feet, she was very lethargic and unresponsive, she had a flat chin and a large soft spot, she had a tiny indentation on one earlobe, she would not suck, and her hands were turned slightly outward.

On Hope's second day of life, a geneticist who examined her came to our room. He told us that he

suspected Hope had a metabolic disorder called Zellweger Syndrome. Because she was missing something in her cells called peroxisomes, which rid cells of toxins, her systems would slowly shut down.

And then he dropped the bomb that most babies with this syndrome live less than six months. No treatment. No cure. No survivors. I felt like the air had been sucked out of me. While he was talking, I let out a low groan.

To be honest, it just didn't seem real. Sometimes it still doesn't. My husband, David, crawled into the hospital bed with me and we cried and we cried out to God. The next morning when I woke up, I was hoping that perhaps I had dreamed the whole thing—but I hadn't.

We called our pastor and asked him to come see us that morning. I looked at him and said, “Well, I guess here is where the rubber meets the road. Here is where I find out if I really believe what I say I believe.” I knew I had to choose how I was going to respond to this incredible disappointment and sorrow.

In the days following the diagnosis, as we learned how to feed Hope with a tube, awaited the anticipated onset of seizures, and began to accept

the reality that she would be with us for only a short time, I returned to the story of Job. I wanted to look more closely at how Job responded as his world fell apart.

Perhaps you've experienced your world falling apart. Maybe your marriage has ended, or your parents' marriage has ended. Maybe financial disaster has come your way and you're trying to dig your way out. Maybe your child has rejected your values and rejected you. Maybe you've received the diagnosis you didn't want. Or maybe, like me, you have faced the sorrow and loneliness of losing someone you love.

Do you feel as if your world has fallen apart? If so, you know what it is like to feel hurt and helpless and hopeless in the midst of loss. And perhaps you, too, are wondering if you will ever find your way out of this place of pain.

Throughout the pages of this short book, we're going to look carefully at Job's experience, because Job shows us how a person of faith responds when his world falls apart. We know Job was a great man of faith because the writer tells us so in the first verse of the first chapter, describing Job as a man of complete integrity who feared God and stayed away

from evil. And, later in the same chapter, God himself uses these same words to describe Job.

This introduction shows us that Job was devoted to God. He had impeccable character. We could even describe Job as God's friend. In fact, when God endeavored to choose one person he knew would be faithful to him no matter what, he chose Job—with complete confidence. Job must have proved himself faithful over and over for God to have that kind of confidence in him!

But Satan is skeptical. Satan thinks Job is faithful only because Job is supernaturally protected by God and has such a comfortable life, and that if his comfortable life were taken away, Job would turn on God.

At this point, God gives Satan permission to hurt Job. We don't want to hear that, because it just doesn't square with our understanding of a loving God. But it is clear. God gives the permission and sets the parameters for Job's suffering.¹

“‘All right, you may test him,’ the Lord said to Satan. ‘Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically’” (Job 1:12).

Do you wonder why God would give permis-

sion for Satan to harm Job? More importantly, do you wonder why God has given Satan permission to bring so much pain into *your* life?

Before we try to answer the question “Why?” let’s look closely at how Job responds as everything he has and everyone he loves are abruptly ripped away.

We’ll see that Job’s story is about much more than his suffering. Somehow, along the way, he discovers God in a way he has never known him before. And when his story comes to a close, we see that “the Lord blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. . . . He died, an old man who had lived a long, good life.”

Isn’t that what you and I want, even now, in the midst of our painful circumstances—to understand God like we never have before, to see him as we’ve never seen him before, to emerge from our days of suffering with God’s blessing and with a life that can be described as good?

How did Job move from profound pain to profound blessing? Let’s follow Job’s steps closely to discover his secret. Let’s examine each stepping stone along the way. Let’s follow him on the pathway of suffering so that he might lead us to the very heart of God.



One day when Job's sons and daughters were dining at the oldest brother's house, a messenger arrived at Job's home with this news: "Your oxen were plowing, with the donkeys feeding beside them, when the Sabeans raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with this news: "Three bands of Chaldean raiders have stolen your camels and killed your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother's home. Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the desert and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

Job stood up and tore his robe in grief.