

The ONE
YEAR®
BOOK OF

HOPE



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The One Year Book of Hope

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week 1

BROKENHEARTED

Brokenhearted. Crushed in spirit. Does that describe the state of your soul? Are you wondering if you will ever feel good again, ever feel hope again? Are you desperate to find a salve to sooth the searing emotional or physical pain that has invaded your existence?

Your feelings may tell you that God is very far away from you right now. But the reality is that he is drawn to you. If you have invited God into your life, he is especially near to you now because you need him so desperately.

You may feel that no one wants to be around you. Deep down we know that it is not a lot of fun to be with someone who is sad. But God loves brokenhearted people. He doesn't avoid them. He is closer to you now than ever, waiting to talk with you, comfort you, and offer you hope and healing as you face the future.

THIS WEEK'S PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION ∞

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.

—PSALM 34:18

TELLING YOURSELF THE TRUTH

I WEEP WITH GRIEF; ENCOURAGE ME BY YOUR WORD. KEEP ME FROM LYING TO MYSELF;
GIVE ME THE PRIVILEGE OF KNOWING YOUR LAW. I HAVE CHOSEN TO BE FAITHFUL;
I HAVE DETERMINED TO LIVE BY YOUR LAWS. —PSALM 119:28-30



When we are hurting, it seems like everyone wants to fix us. And advice is often free-flowing. Well-meaning friends and family tell us what to do and how to feel, only adding to our confusion. And then there's the voice inside our own minds speaking to us too. Oh, the painful thoughts that go through our heads when the hurt is deep! *I will never be able to be happy again. My life is over. I will be alone forever. God must not love me. God must be punishing me. I am such a failure.*

The psalmist must have recognized this voice and realized it is a voice that cannot be trusted. "Keep me from lying to myself," he said. In the midst of personal pain, he was desperate to hear the truth and live by the truth. He knew that emotions lie to us and people mislead us, but God's Word speaks the truth we are desperate for, even as we weep with grief.

So how do we keep from lying to ourselves in the midst of pain? Instead of believing the voice inside us that says, "God must not care about me," we gaze upon the God we see throughout Scripture who lovingly cares for his own. Even when our feelings tell us, "I will never feel good again," we hold tightly to the truth that God "heals the broken-hearted, binding up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

Am I talking about denying real feelings by quoting quips and clichés? Not at all. Honestly, I resent it when someone seems to pat me on the head with a Bible verse in a way that seems to devalue my genuine hurt and dismiss my deep questions. I'm talking about confronting our very real fears, feelings, and thoughts with scriptural truth. I'm talking about digging deep in God's Word to figure out who he is and what his purposes are in the world and in our lives. Truth soothes our fears, changes our feelings, and shapes our thoughts. The truth is what we need most when the hurt is the deepest. Would you walk through the Scripture with me over the year ahead in search of truth to soothe your soul?

My Source for what is true, I desperately need the encouragement that I know can only come from your Word. Open my eyes to the truths that can dispel the doubt and discouragement I feel from the lies I have listened to.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read as much of Psalm 119 as you have time for, noting the benefits of studying and knowing God's Word when you're hurting. What does the psalmist ask God for that you also want to ask of God?

YOUR TEARS MATTER TO GOD

YOU KEEP TRACK OF ALL MY SORROWS. YOU HAVE COLLECTED ALL MY TEARS IN YOUR BOTTLE. YOU HAVE RECORDED EACH ONE IN YOUR BOOK. —PSALM 56:8



I remember going up to the cosmetics counter a few weeks after my daughter, Hope, died and asking if the mascara I was considering would run down my face when I cried. The salesperson assured me it wouldn't and then asked with a laugh in her voice, "Are you going to be crying?"

"Yes," I answered. "I am." And I have. I used to rarely cry, but now tears are always close to the surface, just waiting to be released. It is as if there is a broken place inside me where tears are stored. Letting them out has been the only way to release the pressure of the pain.

Along with relief, there is also the uncomfortable loss of control that is a companion to tears, isn't there? Some see tears not only as a loss of control but also as a lack of faith. It is as if the physical manifestation of tears gives evidence of a spiritual deficiency—that if our faith was big enough or deep enough or developed enough, we simply wouldn't be this sad. It is as if we think our grasp of spiritual realities can erase the hurts of being human. But when you've lost something or someone who is valuable to you, when you have been forced to let go of a dream or live within a nightmare—that is something to be sad about. So let yourself be sad.

And know that God does not discount or dismiss your tears. They are precious to him because you are precious to him. In fact, when God reveals glimpses of the culmination of human history—in a future that will fully reveal and be fully worthy of his glory—he includes, as a centerpiece, this promise in Isaiah 25:8: "The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears." Picture in your mind right now the Lord of the universe reaching down to gently and lovingly wipe away your tears. He doesn't ignore them or tell you that if you really had faith you wouldn't cry. He wipes them away. And Revelation 21:4 tells us that not only will he wipe away tears, he will remove all of the sorrow that caused them. God's plan for the future is to destroy forever the evil that has brought you so much pain and then to live forever with you in a place he has lovingly prepared where there will be no more tears.

My Tear Collector, sometimes you seem so far away, it's hard for me to grasp that you are sad with me. Give me the faith to see you now beside me and to see a future in which your hand will wipe away my tears forever.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Psalm 56. Make a list of what David determined to do despite his tears.

GUARD YOUR HEART

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING; INSTEAD, PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING. TELL GOD WHAT YOU NEED, AND THANK HIM FOR ALL HE HAS DONE. IF YOU DO THIS, YOU WILL EXPERIENCE GOD'S PEACE, WHICH IS FAR MORE WONDERFUL THAN THE HUMAN MIND CAN UNDERSTAND. HIS PEACE WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS AS YOU LIVE IN CHRIST JESUS. —PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7



Broken hearts are very vulnerable; they must be guarded carefully. When your heart has been broken, it can either become more soft and pliable to the work of God, or it can become hardened toward God and the things of God. And it is a strong temptation to harden our hearts toward God when he has disappointed us and when it feels like he has deserted us.

If your heart is broken, are you willing to allow this hurt to serve as a softening agent that makes you more aware of God, more alive to his purposes, more sensitive to his Spirit at work on you and in you? Or will you let your heart become hardened so that you no longer hear his word, accept his rebuke, experience his mercy?

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explains how to keep our hearts from becoming hardened. “Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this . . . his peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” To nurture a soft heart, keep telling God what you need, even when you hardly know what to say or what to ask for or if he hears you. Thank him for who he is and what he has done, for all he has given you, and for the ways he is making himself known to you. Gratitude plows up the ground for God’s peace to grow. This is the kind of peace in the midst of pain that is foreign and unintelligible to the world, and can only come supernaturally. Peace is a gift of God, but we prepare ourselves to receive this gift as we pray about everything, cultivate gratitude, and refuse to surrender to worry.

You can emerge from your days of sorrow with a heart that has been softened to the Spirit of God—what a beautiful and profitable experience that will be! Or you can allow your heart to be hardened by bitterness and resentment toward God, and rejection of his peace and grace—what a dark place that will take you . . . a place far away from the loving embrace of God. “They are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him” (Ephesians 4:18).

Heart Mender, take this broken heart of mine and make it soft and sensitive to your Spirit. I want to stay close to you and soft toward you.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Hebrews 3. What led to the Israelites’ hearts being hardened? What were the consequences? From verses 12-15, what do you need to do or refrain from doing to avoid hardness of heart?

BITTER BEYOND WORDS

HE SHOT HIS ARROWS DEEP INTO MY HEART. THE THOUGHT OF MY SUFFERING AND HOPELESSNESS IS BITTER BEYOND WORDS. I WILL NEVER FORGET THIS AWFUL TIME, AS I GRIEVE OVER MY LOSS. YET I STILL DARE TO HOPE WHEN I REMEMBER THIS: THE UNFAILING LOVE OF THE LORD NEVER ENDS! BY HIS MERCIES WE HAVE BEEN KEPT FROM COMPLETE DESTRUCTION. —LAMENTATIONS 3:13, 19-22



Sometimes I feel guilty about my grief. Not because I think there is something wrong or unspiritual about recognizing my loss and valuing my loss. I feel guilty because sometimes I think my grief is more about me than about Hope or Gabriel. I feel sad not just when I think about them and their difficult, limited lives, but when the mental snapshots remind me of the pain *I* felt, the fear *I* felt, the disappointment that swallowed *me*.

I remember when it first hit me. The depth of the cry bordering on a scream bubbled inside and then burst out of me. It scared me, and I know it scared David. I think that is when he first wondered if he'd ever get his wife back, or if she was gone forever, lost to sorrow.

I am well aware that so many have suffered in much more significant ways than I have, but there is no real comparison of pain. It all just hurts. And with the author of Lamentations, I would say, "the thought of my suffering is bitter beyond words." And I echo his words: "I will never forget this awful time."

But I would also echo the ray of light that peeks out of his next phrase: "Yet I still dare to hope." The memory of hope is as vivid as the memory of pain. What could have made him dare to hope? What could possibly give *you* the courage and confidence to have hope in the midst of your bitter suffering? Remembering the love of God. Rehearsing his past faithfulness to you. Choosing to think about the sufficiency and eternity of God's love. It may seem daring to make room in your mind for what you know is true about God, and honestly, it is difficult when it feels as if he has shot his arrows deep into your heart. But the truth of God's love transforms our thoughts and our feelings when we choose to remember and choose to believe.

Lord, how the hurt lingers, making it hard to remember that your love is unfailing and eternal. Remind me of your love—my only source of hope for the future. Make the reality of your faithfulness more vivid than my pain.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Lamentations 3. What phrases can you relate to in verses 1-20? What does the writer choose to do and to believe in verses 21-66 that generates hope?

BUT I AM TRUSTING

I AM DYING FROM GRIEF; MY YEARS ARE SHORTENED BY SADNESS. MISERY HAS DRAINED MY STRENGTH; I AM WASTING AWAY FROM WITHIN. BUT I AM TRUSTING YOU, O LORD, SAYING, "YOU ARE MY GOD!" MY FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS. —PSALM 31:10, 14-15



We had known I was pregnant with Gabriel for almost eight weeks and it had been three weeks since the prenatal testing, and we were waiting for the call with the test results. I wrote about it in my journal, the morning of January 26, 2001:

I get a sinking feeling in my stomach when I think about knowing one way or the other, but today, I'm just ready to know, ready to know how to feel, how to plan. Mostly, I want to say yes to God in whatever he has for us. If someone had asked me when I was pregnant before if I wanted to experience what we did with Hope, I'm sure I would have said no. And yet it was the most profound experience of blessing we've ever had. She brought us so much joy. I would have been a fool to say no. So I find myself now wanting to say yes to whatever God has for us because I know his plans for me are better than I can plan for myself.

That day the call came from the geneticist, who delivered the news that the child I was carrying was already suffering the fatal effects of Zellweger Syndrome. David and I stood in the kitchen and went over a list of Scripture verses to put on the letter we were preparing to send out to everyone we knew, looking for the verse that would best express the reality of our fear as well as our resolve. Then we found it: "But I am trusting you, O LORD, saying, 'You are my God!' My future is in your hands."

I would like to tell you that our desire to trust in God erased the fear we had about the future—but it wouldn't be true. What I will tell you is that we *determined* to trust God with the future of our family. And it wasn't a decision we made one day for forever. It is a decision we made again every day (or at least most days) and a decision we continue to make every day. It's the same for you. Will you trust God today even as your life feels shortened by sadness? Will you surrender your future into the loving hands of God?

You are my God, and I want to trust you with the hurts of my past and the pain that may be in my future. Today I choose to trust you and believe you'll give me the grace to trust you tomorrow, too.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Psalm 40. On what did the psalmist base his choice to trust God? What kind of impact did it have on the people around him? What were his circumstances? What are the benefits of trusting God?



week 1
Brokenhearted

REFLECTION

What are some of the untruths you hear from others and from your own mind that you need to confront with the truth?

Have you determined to trust God with your future? How is that evident in your life?



MEDITATION

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.

—PSALM 34:18

Quiet yourself in the presence of God, and meditate on the comforting promises of this verse.

Express your brokenheartedness and crushed spirit to God, laying it all before him.

Ask God to make the closeness of his presence known to you, and open yourself to his rescue.



PRAYER

Praise God that his hands are big enough and strong enough to hold you and your future, no matter what happens.

Thank God for loving you enough and caring deeply enough to keep track of your sorrows and treasure your tears.

Intercede for those you love, that God would use the hurt in their lives to soften them toward himself and keep their hearts from being hardened.

Confess your tendency to focus only on the bitterness of your suffering and to forget God's unfailing love and faithfulness.

Petition God to replace the lies you have told yourself with an ever-flowing fountain of his truth.