HOPE

Gaining a Hopeful Spirit

Joni Eareckson Tada



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Gaining A Hopeful Spirit



This handy eBook:

- Shows you how to be a source of joy for someone else when you are going through a hard time yourself—**in less than 30 minutes.**
- Gives wisdom, tips and insight from Joni Eareckson Tada, an international advocate for individuals with disabilities, a published author, a founder of a non-profit organization, and a quadriplegic who has learned how to trust in God in all circumstances.
- Draws you closer to God as you realize that the hope that can get you through even the toughest of times only comes from the Father.

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When All Hope Seems Gone

In the 45 years I've lived as a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, I have learned that hope is a precious thing. Paralyzed without the use of my hands or legs—yet I thrive on hope!

My heart goes out to those who are in despair for lack of hope. Take the story of 15-year-old Danielle, a winning gymnast who sustained a serious spinal cord injury to her neck in 2012. I received the following email from Holly, Danielle's aunt:

> *The atmosphere in the ICU around Danielle was horrible. Our family was so devastated when her surgeon told us that she would never walk again. At that point my niece could only lift her arms about six inches. She had no other movement anywhere. My brother Dan choked out the words, "Do you know anyone with the Joni Eareckson Tada organization?" I knew who you were because I had read your first book. I called your office and spoke with your assistant, Judy. She called Dan right away. Joni, before we talked with Judy we were experiencing the deepest pain over Danielle's accident. But then Judy called us and everything changed. We had hope! Hope for a possible recovery, no matter what her recovery would look like. We were all ready to dig in, pray, and do everything we could for our beautiful Danielle. So I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. —Holly*

I was astonished by Holly's email. I asked Judy, "What did you say to give them such hope? Did you promise she'd be healed or something?" Judy explained, "I just told them that her injury was still so recent and she had time to recover at least a little strength and movement ... I reminded them that this was an opportunity to come together as a family as never before ... and that this was a time to put into practice everything they had ever learned from God's Word."

"That's *it*?" I responded. Judy smiled and nodded yes. Danielle's story goes to show how *far* just a little hope can lift a hurting heart. That's how *potent* hope is. It's like a small candle glowing in a dark room—the flame is so tiny and the room is so big, yet the light from the little candle dispels the darkness. Hope is like holding onto the thin string of a powerful kite—the string is so thin in

your hand, yet it connects to a force that can almost lift you off the ground!



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Our Need for Hope

People in today's world are desperate for hope. Bleak economic times test our confidence. The constant barrage of bad news in the media tries our faith. Life can seem bland, and lack meaning and purpose. Our relationships can feel shallow, void of depth and passion. There are any number of life circumstances that can flood us with disappointment.



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For the most part, we are able to muster the emotional strength we need in order to stem the tide of discouragement. But when one bad thing piles on top of the next, it can tip the balance. Disappointment and discouragement begin to overwhelm. That's when you wake up in the morning only to discover you've lost every bright prospect for a better day. And nothing leads to despair like the loss of hope.

Woody Allen has offered a cynical view of our search for hope:

"More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

God never intended that his people should live with such despair. But what *is* hope? Is it wishful thinking? An aspiration for better times? A longing that life will get easier? Something within us says that hope—the sort of life-giving hope that Danielle's family needed—is far deeper and more profound than "wishing upon a star." Our instincts tell us that hope should not be a faint and flighty desire. Hope should be rock solid and real, unshakable, immovable,

and even *eternal*.

It is this dazzling assurance the Bible intends when it speaks of hope. God desires we have this kind of hope; and his intentions are best expressed in Jeremiah 29:11, which says, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

> *Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.*
>
> —Samuel Smiles

Hope Is Possible

Ever felt like you were up against a wall? Stuck. Stalled. Stymied. Smack-dab against a cold, hard, and unyielding barrier with absolutely no way out. You can't go back; you can't go sideways; it's too high to climb; it's impossible to tunnel underneath; and there are no detours. You are absolutely devoid of hope. What do you do?



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A friend once told me, "Joni, when you're up against a wall, the only thing you can do is start walking through it." Sound impossible? Whoever heard of anyone walking through a wall?

Well, someone did. The scene is described in John 20:26. In the Upper Room, Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst of his frightened, discouraged disciples. The door was closed, the walls were thick, and there was no entry or exit. But Jesus did the impossible. He entered the room, and with him came *hope*.

Jesus is constantly asking us to do the impossible. When we face the wall—whether it is pain, an emotionally unbearable circumstance, or a difficult situation beyond anything we've ever encountered before—God wants us to place our hope in him, because with him, all things *are* possible (see Mark 10:27). It *is* possible to smile in the face of disappointment; it *is* possible to trust God in the middle of an injury or illness and to face the day with a bright outlook even though it seems your world is falling apart. The world would say it's impossible, but with God you can always have hope.

What is your wall today? What is the impossible situation that has stopped you in your tracks and is turning you back? Ask the Lord Jesus to meet you there—right where you are. And then walk hand-in-hand with him through that wall to the other side. You'll discover just how wonderful biblical hope is when Jesus leads you through the impossible and into *hope*.

> *As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable.*
>
> —G. K. Chesterton

The Object of Our Hope

> Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the Lord. —Jeremiah 17:7, NKJV
>
> Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. —Lamentations 3:21–22
>
> For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth.—Psalm 71:5
>
> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.—1 Corinthians 15:19
>
> We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.—Titus 2:13–14

Each of these verses speaks of hope, but always in terms of confidence, assurance, trust, and hope *in God*. Christian hope has an object of its focus, and that is God.

- *To hope in God is the best choice for happiness and blessing.*
- *To hope in God is to rely on him when all else fails because you know his mercies and compassion are fresh toward you every day.*
- *To hope in God means assurance that one day all sorrow and sadness will disappear, and you will have a home in heaven.*
- *To hope in God is to have salvation.*
- *And finally, to hope in God is to have the confidence that one day when Christ returns, he will close the curtain on sin, Satan, and suffering, and he will make all things right.*

The basis for your hope is not your heart's desires, as well intended as they might be. You might "hope" for a stronger marriage, a better job, or a body with fewer aches and pains, but the Bible's references to hope go beyond wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is not biblical hope. Romans 15:13 tells us that true hope resides in Jesus Christ, and all hope rests in his plans and purposes: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in

him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."



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The Foundation of Our Hope

After a long day in my wheelchair, I experience bruising pain. After watching an alarming report on the nightly news, I can feel unsettled or angry. But I do not despair because God tells me to always have hope. This world may trouble me and my body can be in pain, but I can take heart. Why? Because Christ has overcome the world. Our foundation of hope is always this: Christ is victorious over the world, the flesh, and the devil. This is the fountain of all hope and happiness in this world. Jesus Christ is our source of hope. The Bible calls Jesus "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13–14).

Jesus Christ has done everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing you from death in sin to life in glory. Our Savior planned and achieved redemption. He called and is keeping you. He has justified, and is sanctifying, and will glorify you when you are finished with this world. What a cause for hope!

Colossians 2:13–15 says, "When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Did you hear that? Jesus triumphed, conquered, and overcame. He gives you power to do the same. This is why you can be hopeful!



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This world may get you down, you may be constantly wrestling against the devil, and your flesh may feel the crunch of older age, but be encouraged "for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Take a moment to meditate on all that Christ has done for you:

I place my hope in Jesus Christ because _____.

I have hope that I can overcome sin because _____.

God is my hope in my suffering because _____.

I have the hope, that is, the assurance and confidence that I am going to heaven because _____.

The Hopeful Journey

There's something I've noticed about the times I've felt hopeless. During those bouts of hopelessness, I lose my ability to see life from a biblical perspective. My soul feels shriveled, my heart caves in to doubt, my faith seems enfeebled, my spirit feels small, and my vision for the future shrinks to nearly nothing.

But when I fix my spiritual eyes on the Blessed Hope, I am able to see life from above! Heaven seems more concrete and real, and I am certain that "faith is being sure of what we hope for" (Heb. 11:1). With God's hope in my heart, life is no longer small. Life has purpose. Life is an adventure to be lived!

The same thing happened to Jesus' disciples. For three years, they enjoyed intimate fellowship with Jesus. They marveled at his miracles and were amazed at his teachings. More than a few times, though, he told them that he would have to go to Jerusalem to die—but that on the third day, he would be raised from the dead.

However, right after Jesus was crucified, the disciples quickly lost heart and lost hope. Luke 24 records a conversation on the road to Emmaus between two of the bereaved disciples and a stranger. They tell this man (who is really Jesus) all about their Lord, and in verse 21 they lament "but we *had hoped* that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" [italics mine].

How quickly the disciples lost their hope! They had forgotten all about Jesus' promises and eternal plan to be their Savior from sin. But then the stranger revealed himself. It was their Savior! "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Suddenly, their hope was restored. All because Jesus was present, pointing them to promises in Scripture.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, your degree of hope has a direct connection to God's Word. The more time you spend reading and studying the Bible, the stronger your hope will be.

Psalm 119:114 says, "You are my refuge and my shield; *I have put my hope in your word*" [italics mine]. Elsewhere it says, "Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws" (Ps. 119:43).

What Bible promises increase your hope?

How can you encourage others on the journey from hope to glory?

Be Joyful in Hope

When it comes to enduring a tough situation, hope can be difficult to hold onto. This may be why the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to encourage his friends who were facing overwhelming circumstances to "be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." God knows when suffering settles in to stay; it takes supernatural effort to be patient in affliction or faithful in prayer. And it may be doubly hard to be joyful in hope. This is why we need a special command—Romans 12:12 reminds us it *is* possible to keep enduring, keep praying faithfully, and keep joyful about hope, especially when all seems to be falling apart around us.



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Okay, you think, *I can understand the need to be patient when things are hard, and faithful in prayer, but I just can't muster honest-to-goodness joy. Besides, what's joy got to do with hope, anyway?*

Romans 15:13 puts it this way: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him." Joy has *everything* to do with hope. As you trust in God, especially when hard times linger, the God of hope gives you his joy (and his peace, too). This joy may not look like what the world considers joy, with its trappings of merriment or cheerful glee. Instead, this joy may feel like a profound and deep gladness ... an unshakable delight ... a quiet but powerful pleasure *that you know* God is in control.

As you *trust* in the God of hope, your faith grows and you *overflow* with hope. What does biblical hope look and feel like?

- A glad confidence that God is working every one of your life circumstances for your good and his glory (see Rom. 8:28).
- A happy assurance that, in the end, even the most difficult life circumstances will ultimately make sense (see Eph. 1:11).
- A greater measure of "joy and peace" in your life (see Rom. 15:13).
- A greater degree of strength and endurance in the face of overwhelming odds (see Isa. 40:31).

Does that seem impossible now, from your current point of view? Take heart! Isaiah 40:31 tells us, "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." To place your hope in God is to wait on him, and waiting on him does not mean passive indifference—hanging around and doing nothing. Hope in God is saying "no" to fear or discouragement, and by so doing, saying "yes" to something that will satisfy much more down the line. Wait on God, believing that what God has planned is so much better than what we grab for ourselves!

Jesus is so much dearer, sweeter, and nearer to me now than when I first believed as a teenager. When I was new in the faith, I appreciated what Jesus had done, but I never considered him ... precious. Only old hymn writers spoke of him as precious! Now I am old. And Jesus is my true Friend, my Fortress when I am frightened, my Beloved when I give him praise, my Righteousness when I have sinned, and my Shepherd who seeks me when I've gone astray. Romans 12:12 says, "Be joyful in hope"—and I am!

The word hope I take for faith; and indeed hope is nothing else but the constancy of faith.

—John Calvin

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in

increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—2 Peter 1:5–8

Pass on the Hope!

Back in 1967, missionary Doug Nichols fell ill while serving in India. He had to spend several months in a dingy tuberculosis sanitarium. While there, he tried to give Gospel tracts to the patients and doctors, but no one would accept them. Understandably, Doug became discouraged. He was sick, weak, lonely, and disappointed that no one would listen to him. He began to feel his hope fading.

One night around 2:00 a.m., Doug woke up coughing. Across the aisle, he noticed an old man trying to get out of bed and get to the bathroom. Too weak to stand, the man fell back into bed crying and exhausted. Although sick and weak himself, Doug got out of bed. With a smile, he lifted the man and carried him down the hall to the filthy, smelly washroom, then back to his bed. The old man smiled and said the Indian word for "thanks."

The next morning, one of the other patients woke Doug with a steaming cup of tea and asked for a Gospel tract. Then other patients asked for the booklets. Even nurses and a doctor asked for one. Over the next few days, several patients and staff gave their lives to Christ. The whole situation changed because of Doug's sacrificial act in the middle of the night.

Doug's hope had been restored, and with it, his joy and peace. During his remaining time in the sanitarium, those dingy hallways and rooms were transformed through the hope people found in Christ.

- *What lit the spark of hope in that sanitarium? What action and attitude?*
- *Who lacks hope in your circle of friends, family, and coworkers?*
- *In what ways can you pass on God's hope to others?*



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Hope for the Future

Walk into a Christian bookstore and you will often see this verse featured: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11).

It is a beautiful promise and a favorite of many Christians. Everyone enjoys the idea that God's plans for his children are to prosper them and not harm them, to give hope and a future bright with possibilities. But let's take a reality check. The context of this verse is striking. It was part of a letter written by the prophet Jeremiah and placed into the hands of the exiles being dragged off to Babylon. The Israelites faced a long, difficult journey that ended in slavery, much as their ancestors did in Egypt. Many of them would never see their homeland again.

Yet God gave this invigorating and encouraging promise to inspire the captives. They were not to lose heart. They were not to lose hope. In the future, the Lord would deliver them and bring the people back to Jerusalem. Despite the heartbreak of captivity, God's purpose was not to harm his people —true, they would feel the lash of slavery and hardship, but it ultimately meant a prosperous future.



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In the past, have you assumed that this wonderful verse about your "hopeful future" was your guarantee that God would keep at bay pain and

disappointments, trials and tribulations? God's purpose for us is to make us more like Christ; and this will mean hardship. So what is the hope and future all about? "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27)!

This is the ultimate aim of hope: that Christ will be glorified in us for all of eternity. And just like the exiles in Babylon, you and I are exiles on this earth. Yes, it is very hard, but Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us of what that hopeful future is all about—Christ living in and shining through you for all of eternity. With such a marvelous future, you have every reason for hope!

> *Because God is love, his plans can only be loving. Because God is good, his intentions for you are of the highest good. Because he is the Lord of Hope, his purpose is to always give you hope. He can never be (or do!) less than he is.*

Hope … the *Best* of Things

Ron is a former pastor who broke his neck in a motorcycle accident. His wife had contacted me, distraught that Ron had given up and sunk into deep depression. For weeks he had been lying in a dark bedroom, not wanting any visitors. As a pastor, Ron probably knew more Scripture than I did. I talked with him, but after an hour of conversation, it was clear to me that Ron was not responding. And so, I took a different tact. I asked him, "Did you see the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*?" He seemed surprised at my question, but he told me that he had. I continued: "Remember when Andy Duphrane said to his fellow prisoner, 'Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies ... so get busy living, or get busy dying.'" Ron was quiet for a long moment. I said, "Ron, I want you to join me and 15,000 other quadriplegics in America this morning who are deciding to get out of bed and get busy living. Would you do that with me?" Finally, he said softly, "Maybe hope *is* a good thing."

I invited Ron and his family to one of our Family Retreats. Once Ron saw other quads in wheelchairs moving forward into life and trusting God with their circumstances, hope seemed to grow in his heart. He was experiencing the reality of Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *as you trust in him*, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" [italics mine].

Ron was trusting God with hope that had seemed impossible just weeks earlier. What a difference it made for Ron to be around others who were hanging onto God and "getting busy living!" That dark bedroom had been suffocating what hope Ron had; but at Family Retreat, with others like him, he could see the possibilities in living his life for God's glory.

Despair and depression dissipate when we trust in "the God of hope." And it always helps when we keep company with hopeful people—courage can't help but breed more courage. The result? Ron and his wife returned to Family Retreat the following year to serve new families who were struggling. There they were, passing on hope to others!



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How might you foster hope in someone who is despairing?

- Surround him or her with prayer.
- Gently draw the despairing person out of social isolation.
- Introduce him or her to others who are "getting busy living."
- Meet any practical needs and provide whatever resources are required.
- Encircle him or her with spiritual community who will uplift and encourage.
- Keep in contact with encouraging words, a Scripture verse in a note card, or spending time on the phone together.
- Nudge people toward "the Blessed Hope," the Lord Jesus.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

—Hebrews 6:19

Steps Toward Hope

There are practical steps you can take toward gaining a hopeful spirit. Do you feel a situation is hopeless? Are you overcome with doubts and fears? Have you lost your way on your life's journey? Move forward into hope by ...

- **Turning disappointment on its head.** Look at this promise from Isaiah 49:23: "Those who hope in me will not be disappointed." This is a promise you can stand on. When dark moods encroach and disappointment deflates your spirits, take it as a signal to get into God's Word ... to pray earnestly ... to witness boldly ... and to believe God means what he says. Place your "hopeless" circumstances in his hands, and you won't be disappointed.
- **Talking to your soul.** Remind your sad soul of things from God's Word you know to be true. The psalmist did this all the time. He says to himself in Psalm 42:5–6, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." Make your soul submit to God's commands. Have it stand at attention every morning, awaiting God's directions. Encouraging your own soul is a solid step toward hope.
- **Keeping your eye on the goal.** Take on life's problems one by one. Do not allow your emotions to rule the day, but faithfully persevere in trusting God. Ultimately, that perseverance will produce a godly character in your life, and establish a concrete hope that can never be shaken. Romans 5:3–5 says, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."



Joni Eareckson Tada, the founder and chief executive officer of Joni and Friends International Disability Center, is an international advocate for people with disabilities. A diving accident in 1967 left Joni Eareckson, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. After two years of rehabilitation, she emerged with new skills and a fresh determination to help others in similar situations. She founded Joni and Friends in 1979 to provide Christ-centered programs to special needs families, as well as training to churches. Through the organization's ***Christian Institute on Disability***, Joni and her team have helped develop disability ministry courses of study in major Christian universities and seminaries. Visit us at www.joniandfriends.org.

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