

CHAPTER 1 The Power of Hope

Saturday principle: God assures us that he is at work in the midst of our heartache, even though we may not feel it or experience it.

THE LAST TWO and a half years had knocked me off my feet physically and emotionally. I felt battered as if I'd been thrown into a raging river, tumbled over jagged rocks, and pulled by the undertow until there was no part of me that was without bruises or cuts. At times I couldn't breathe from how fast and furious life had given me a new crisis before I could deal with the two previous ones. Heartache on top of distress and then multiplied.

And now here I was at Ground Zero, two months after the terrorist attack, expected to hand out hope when mine was in short supply. As I stood at the gaping hole that used to be the Twin Towers, my heartaches paled in comparison to what I was witnessing in New York. I couldn't grasp what I was seeing. There was a mound of wreckage several stories high and a crater hundreds of feet deep. So massive was the crater that the people in the bottom of the pit looked like ants, and the enormous pile of rubble was several city blocks square. I'd seen the images on TV, but it did not

prepare me for this pit of hell that seemed to have no end. There were odd structures sticking up in the air, pieces of what might once have been a stairwell, or an office for an accountant. Long strands of cable and pieces of walls hung from random, unrecognizable pillars of debris.

The air was thick with a dense, hazy fog because the sky was filled with relentless plumes of smoke and dust. A powerful jet of water shot out of an unseen source and vainly attempted to tamp down the smog-like air. Several buildings on the edge of this large canyon of wreckage were sheltered by orange tarp coverings, their windows blown out and odd pieces of some other structure piercing their sides. I wondered how many buildings in total had been damaged.

The night air was filled with the constant beeping of large machines backing up and cranes pulling up steel girding and large sections of unidentifiable somethings. Trucks the size of buildings were moving debris from one place to another. The sound of jackhammers ricocheted among the structures. Temporary lights, like those at a huge football stadium, standing many stories tall, illuminated the scene. No one spoke, but crowds of people were witnesses at this mass grave. Behind me were temporary walls covered in photos of loved ones with messages to call if found, a mournful reminder of how we can cling to hope even when we rationally know all is lost.

I was with five counseling colleagues on a mission to provide counseling services to first responders and to equip clergy on how to minister to trauma survivors. The unimaginable horrors we heard from those working at Ground Zero and the visual destruction left us shaken and doubtful our small efforts would make a dent in the needs of the New Yorkers.

The volume of pain and the overwhelming problems were louder and bigger here at Ground Zero, far more than my personal heartache, but the need was the same: hope and healing.

That's what we all yearn for when heartache upends our life. Our cry is,

“Please let something be better,” or “Send me something to soothe my pain.”

Saturday, a crossroads of need and longing. The day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

LET ME EXPLAIN how I came to the idea that Saturday is when we cry out for healing. I had no way to know on a blustery spring day that in a few hours we'd be at the Nationwide Children's Hospital ER, fending off fear and trying to comprehend the doctor's words. Some suffering strikes suddenly. Type 1 diabetes is present but hidden until one day it explodes into your awareness with skyrocketing blood sugars, a defunct pancreas, and massive fear of the next extreme dip that could bring death. The year following that fateful spring day was an hour-by-hour existence trying to learn how to calculate carbohydrates, serving sizes, and insulin doses.

While in the learning curve of Type 1, the additional plagues from Exodus entered our territory: a flash flood for my in-laws, my hysterectomy, two other surgeries, carbon monoxide poisoning for my dad, a frivolous lawsuit, experimental drug infusions, hail, and frogs. Wait . . . well, not the hail and frogs, but we were beset by one affliction after another, resulting in a deep and abiding weariness that made me call out to God repeatedly, “This is too much to bear. This is too much.”

The landscape in our lives was pretty miserable. As I was praying for healing and hope, I got the oddest direction: “Look at Saturday.” Huh? What was that supposed to mean? I must have misunderstood. What did a day of the week have to do with my turmoil and need for hope? It didn't make any sense. But I continued day after day to pray for hope, and the direction

remained the same. A soft whisper in my heart of “Look at Saturday.”

It eventually became clear to me that Saturday meant the middle day of the Easter story, the day between the Good Friday crucifixion and the Easter Sunday resurrection. An epic beforeand-after narrative. But what was there to know about this Holy Saturday besides waiting and Easter egg hunts?

I discovered my Bible software offered only two scriptural references, and they didn’t reveal anything to help me understand the Saturday directive. So, I phoned my pastor, convinced I had missed something. Nope, that’s all there was recorded, he assured me. Internet searches turned up Holy Saturday references in the liturgies of the Catholic and Episcopal churches, but when I looked them up, I found barely a paragraph-long prayer. I consulted with an Episcopal priest and a Catholic scholar, and they, too, confirmed that Easter Saturday rituals marked the time on the calendar but did not ascribe any meaning to the day except waiting.

Saturday is often obscured in the Easter story and in our personal stories by the overwhelming emotions of the Friday losses, a cascade of fear, anger, shock, doubt, sadness, angst. Fill in the blank with every emotion because Friday losses hit us so hard that we are left spinning. As we are spun around in that sea of emotion, we reach for the Sunday recovery we so desperately need. We search for it, grasp for it, demand it. Every psychologist repeatedly hears clients ask, “How long will this take?” and “How long will it be before it’s better?” Friday sorrow demands we reach for Sunday redemption as if the Saturday healing time and experience could be skipped.

The first glimpse I got at understanding Saturday as a necessary and critical, albeit unwanted, part of healing was in the first week of my season of heartache. Sometimes our children teach us God’s truths.

Ryan, an eighth grader, pitched a no-hitter through five innings, and he looked strong and intimidating. Then he suddenly seemed to lose his edge and focus. Ryan looked like his energy just deflated, and the coach took him out of the game. Ryan said he just got tired and was fine. Nothing unusual for a teenager. I went off to bed that night without a worry. Then, I woke up with a thought impressed on my mind: Ryan has diabetes. What? I looked at the clock and it was 3:02 a.m. Where did that thought come from? I looked around the dark room—no one was there except my husband who was snoring away. What a crazy thought. Ryan couldn't have diabetes; he is strong and healthy. Why, he'd barely been to the pediatrician in the last five years except for checkups. But the thought persisted and I tossed and turned. Sleep eluded me. Finally, about 5:30 a.m., I said to myself, "I'll tell Mike in the morning about this crazy idea that Ryan has diabetes, and he will tell me that I am being an overreactive mother."

Ryan boarded the school bus and I told Mike, "I think something is wrong with Ryan." Mike seemed unsurprised and said, "I know. He has diabetes. I woke up this morning, Pam, and God just put it on my heart that Ryan has diabetes. I know that sounds crazy but . . ." I sat down with a thud, the blood draining from my face.

Dr. Crickard looked surprised when I brought Ryan in to be checked for diabetes. I was trying to hold on to the hope that I was wrong. When she questioned me about what prompted me to investigate diabetes, I hedged. Surely, she would think I was nuts if I said, "God woke me up and told me Ryan had diabetes." So I mumbled some vague response.

Things moved quickly after she tested Ryan's urine and saw that his blood sugar was 644, dangerously high. We had avoided calamity by seeking medical care before the symptoms and consequences were huge. Over the next days, we had a crash course in Type 1, and our lives abruptly took a sharp turn into a

world we didn't know existed and of which we didn't want any part. Life became a blur of doctors, nurses, phone calls, learning a new language of carbs, needles, insulin doses.

As we drove home after a full day of appointments, Mike and I were in the front seat of our car talking about how difficult it was to learn everything in such a short period of time. Fourteen-year-old Ryan piped up from the back seat. "Mom, if God woke you up in the middle of the night to tell you I had diabetes, he knew what was coming. This is no surprise to him that I have a bum pancreas.

So, I know he will take care of me."

My head swiveled and I saw Saturday faith living and breathing in the back seat while I wandered around in doubt. I thought God should be sparing us the Friday problem and was focused on looking for the Sunday solution. Ryan's words directed me to *God being present in the moments of our heartache on Saturday*.

As each new upheaval came into my life, I pressed into this idea of God putting this seemingly empty day into the powerful resurrection story. In my story, your story, and Ground Zero, the destruction can be so powerful and widespread that we may miss what is happening now because we are focused on what Sunday healing might look like. Sunday recovery becomes the focus, and we can miss God's use of this silent day to comfort us and to foster greater dependency on him. Consider he could be saying: "I know your pain, your fear, your confusion, and I am here with you, even as the rest of the world goes on as if nothing has happened. In the stillness, I am present to you in new ways."

Saturday is when difficulties look unsolvable. It feels like my experience gazing at the pit of 9/11 destruction: overwhelming and impossible. The pieces of your life will not go back into the mold of what once was normal. You're out of sorts and at your wit's end trying to find a path through the pit, only to be met with

more obstacles. In the midst of your Saturday, you cannot envision a new, hopeful, vibrant life. Your heartache blocks out your ability to hope for the future.

When I was at Ground Zero, the best outcome I could foresee was the removal of all the debris, and even that still seemed impossible to accomplish within the next fifty years. The best result I could imagine was a deserted, desolate, unproductive eyesore, probably surrounded by chain link fences, tall weeds, and litter. But I was wrong, very wrong. Today Ground Zero is a complex of office buildings, a new train station, a 9/11 Memorial Museum and One World Trade Center Tower. It's an incredible complex of beautiful buildings and a multiple layer fountain honoring all who were lost that terrible day.

Because the future is unknowable, you live in Saturday, the barren day where restoration seems improbable or impossible. Some things are truly unsolvable no matter how much effort you put into problem solving. We can perhaps improve them or lessen them or cope with them. But the heartache remains. Death of our loved ones, destruction of our family by divorce, incurable illness, addictions, getting fired from a job, being victimized by crime or violence are all troubles we can't change once they happen. Alzheimer's disease, mental illness diagnosis, being abused as a child. The list is endless of unsolvable problems and the resulting heartache. Some enter our lives with a sudden lightning bolt that upends our world quickly, and others come slowly like water torture. They drip, drip, drip into our life with a regularity that erodes our hope and fatigues our spirit.

Coping with Saturday became a way to describe what I do for a living. I come alongside people in their Saturday times, when the awful events have happened, and the resurrection of their life has not yet become a reality. And frankly, they are wondering if any recovery will ever happen. Hope can be in short supply on this silent day.

However heartaches come, they all create a before-and-after measurement. We describe our lives as *before* mom became ill, or *after* I broke my leg, or *before* the accident. It's a way we mark major events that change us and our lives. Saturday is part of the story *after* Good Friday that results in the powerful transformation known as Easter Sunday. It is squeezed in between the most epic before-and-after story in history, and I want to help you grasp the wealth that we can mine from Saturday.

WHILE ALL THE problems in my season of heartache were difficult, none challenged my heart more than Ryan's diagnosis. I begged God to take this disease from him. I bargained and pleaded, knowing it was illogical. I wept for the permanent ways it had altered Ryan's life. He couldn't be a carefree kid anymore. We quickly began to dread mealtimes because of all the math calculations and arguments over the details of what might be affecting his blood sugars.

It was a year before we discovered the dirty secret of Type 1; sometimes blood sugars go up or down for no apparent reason. Our sleep routines were disrupted by the need to check blood sugars in the middle of the night. We became tired and cranky. Multiple doctor visits became the new normal. Searching for a cure when there was none. Coping with the high price of insulin that our insurance didn't cover. Navigating those who pitied Ryan and those who chose to ignore his life crisis. Our lives were upended.

I forgot Ryan's sugar tabs (which are now necessary for him to carry 24/7) on his first day back at school, panicked as I turned around to go back home and get them, and ran a stop sign. The policeman was kind when he pulled me over, but I was a mess. This was our new normal: a bit of chaos, tension, angry words, doctors' offices, and learning a new language of diabetes control.

There was a very steep learning curve, and we were trying and failing, trying and succeeding, trying and failing. It took a year or more before we had anything close to smooth or calm. I'm a smart woman, but this disease challenged me in every way possible.

We avoided certain activities until we figured out how to control the safe storage of insulin and how Ryan could give himself shots in difficult environments. He worried about how the other boys in the baseball dugout would react when he drew blood. Would his coach privately think that Ryan couldn't handle the rigors of pitching due to his need to test and eat to keep his blood sugar levels stable? The first time we went kayaking *after* diabetes, it required us to develop ways to keep his insulin dry and not overheated. Everything he did required planning and forethought because insulin is a several-times-a-day treatment, not a cure. We learned that uncontrolled blood sugar can lead to a quick, sudden death or a lifelong litany of heart, eye, or kidney problems. Big things, small things. His life and ours would never be the same.

My husband turned to working harder in his business to cope with his helplessness over Type 1. Ryan became angry at everything and everyone in his grief. I stayed up late researching online how to do anything and everything about Type 1 diabetes. I was obsessed about what causes this disease and what we could do to stop it. When that turned up only educated theories, I turned to researching experimental treatments. Psychologists are professional problem solvers, and I was determined. I contacted researchers doing clinical trials from all over the country. I ignored my own growing health problems because I was so desperate for hope for my son. My intensity created more angst for others.

From our home in Columbus, Ohio, we drove to Rochester, New York, for a weeklong session of daily drug infusions in the

hopes that participating in this clinical trial would slow the progression of the destruction of beta cells in Ryan's pancreas. After the infusions, we drove the 300-mile round trip to yet another city for follow-up forty-two different days. These daylong trips consumed much of our lives over the next two years. Only when the drug trial was complete did we learn that he had benefitted from the infusions. We were happy our efforts had helped him but smacked with the reality that he still had an incurable, lifelong illness.

I knew I was chasing hope when I pursued the clinical studies. Unsolvable problems can drive you to great lengths, maybe even 12,600 miles like me, to hold on to hope. Hope stands against despair and creates energy to keep moving, to keep living despite the contrary evidence glaring at us. Hope believes something better awaits us. In spite of it all, hope urges us to keep going, to keep trying. The message of hope? In the end, all the effort will be worth it.

You need hope as much as you need air to breathe. I want you to know no matter how lost or despairing you feel, there are hope and help to be found. Often it will be found in unexpected places, places you cannot imagine or create today. Places you cannot create because it is not possible by your own strength or your vision.

Saturday is the day when hope can appear to be lost because life can be brutal and sometimes unrelenting. No matter how dark or confusing or helpless your situation is, Saturday will speak into your life and give you concrete steps to get to the *after* you believe will come but cannot see today.

I sometimes think of the eyes of the firefighters who had been digging through the rubble for days at Ground Zero and their descriptions of finding small bits of body parts and breathing in the air of vaporized human dust. Their eyes were full of sorrow and helplessness when there was no hope of finding anyone alive,

and yet they persisted. They hoped for a better *after* despite all the odds. The cost for them was high with nightmares and health issues and missing time with their families. Their souls were damaged by what they saw. But they persisted *for years* not knowing what would result from their efforts. But knowing if they never began the cleanup, destruction would remain and evil forces would be the victor. All hope would be lost.

As I listened to the first responders, I heard a formula that led them out of their personal wreckage, and it parallels the tools we will explore from Saturday. Take a look at what the first responders revealed:

- Believe in hope.
- Take action of some sort, no matter how small.
- It always takes longer than you think.
- Nothing or no one is too damaged to be salvaged.
- Know you can't envision the healed-*after* picture. It's hidden from your view.
- It takes many helpers: friends, therapists, pastors, doctors.
- Repeat with persistence.
- Remind your problem that you have a big, big God.

A very tangible and vivid example of the first responders' formula for holding on to hope after September 11, 2001, was St. Paul's Chapel of Trinity Church. It is located just across the street from the collapsed World Trade Center buildings and sits on the very edge of the pit of destruction. It's a small brownstone church tucked in between skyscrapers. Amazingly, it was one of the very few buildings still standing in the area, and it had no damage—not even a scratch or a broken pane of glass. The 235-year-old church spire did not have a crack or a scuff or a wobble. One would expect the church to be significantly damaged by the explosion and collapse that occurred on its front doorstep.

But quite surprisingly, St. Paul's was intact and in an incredible physical position to minister to all who worked at Ground Zero and all who sought solace from the deaths and heartache of the horrific attacks. St. Paul's became known as "the little chapel that stood" and was a beacon of hope in a very dark place. For the year after the attacks, St. Paul's was open 24/7 as a relief center for rescue and recovery workers. The tall, white columns and twostory-tall Palladian windows made it a bright and inviting place.

When our group stopped at St. Paul's, I could see first responders sleeping with their gear in the church pews and others praying. Food served by caring volunteers was available around the clock. Chaplains and clergy from different denominations staffed the building to comfort and offer love and spiritual care. Over five thousand people worked at St. Paul's serving hot meals, cleaning, listening, and comforting.

This church should not have survived the deadly attacks. There is no logical reason for the church to have remained unscathed. People marveled at its undamaged presence because it truly was on the lip of the crater of mass destruction. It spoke so clearly and strongly of hope in the midst of pain that people plastered the church with signs and messages of support and tokens like teddy bears, law enforcement patches, and flags. Every inch of the chapel inside and out was covered. When we were there in December 2001, the person guiding the first responders and the tourists out of the church told us that all the notes and mementos had been removed twice already, and what we saw was the third round.

Later, A. B. Curtiss would make a children's book about St. Paul's called *The Little Chapel That Stood* so this story of hope remains alive for children of future generations. St. Paul's stands as a visual representation of hope and encouragement to all who

braved the fight to recapture and rebuild Ground Zero. This lovely church is a clear, physical representation of Saturday. It survived the horrific terrorist attacks and stood steady in the belief that a better tomorrow could be created, even as everything around it testified to powerful destruction and death.

I really cannot fathom the amount of dogged persistence it took to sift through the wreckage of Ground Zero and then to rebuild those sixteen acres of land. But each person did their small part, and that led to reclamation of incredible proportions. It took 4,797 days (over thirteen years) for the many aspects of reconstruction to take place. Let that number sink in. That includes 4,797 days of persistence, hope, and the action of many people. Those are staggering numbers, ones you might relate to in your current condition. Recovery and healing can feel so far away, and the days of working toward healing can seem endless.

It is impossible for every person to have felt hopeful for 4,797 days. They had setbacks, discouragements, and even arguments about the best course of action. Hope is both a feeling and a decision. It's an investment of our heart into a better outcome we cannot see today.

Believing in anything is a volitional act. Often, it's a decision that looks contrary to the current reality. Hope was demonstrated by action in the face of the collapsed wreckage of seven skyscrapers, one church (not St. Paul's), two airplanes, and 2,996 deaths.

I refused to relinquish my grip on hope in our family's heartaches. And I witnessed Ryan grow up quickly

Type 1 diabetes. He was horribly ill from the as he had to face the frightening realities of experimental drug infusions. The medical

Hope is both a feeling and a professionals suggested we consider stop- *decision.*

ping treatment because of the severity of his symptoms.

I was ready to end the infusions

because he was in such pain. But ultimately it was Ryan's decision to make. He told the doctor, "It's like we constructed the four walls of this house, and we need to put the roof on no matter how bad I feel. It doesn't make sense to stop now." He was deciding to hope in the face of contrary circumstances.

Did his hope pay off? Unlike most people with Type 1 diabetes, Ryan has had no hospitalizations in thirteen years. Was that due to the experimental drug infusions? Partly. And Ryan takes responsibility and pride in keeping his blood sugar numbers in range, so his disease is not a barrier to him. He went on to play golf and baseball in high school and even went on to play baseball in college. I think his illness taught him to persist in difficult tasks, including becoming a mechanical engineer. Diabetes is exacting and unrelenting, but I watch Ryan quietly persevere and never complain or quit. He inspires me to not make excuses for myself and to try things I have been afraid to attempt.

THERE IS NO right place to start when the despair in your life is huge. So, start wherever you can with whatever strength you can muster up. No effort is too small. And please don't look every day at the whole pile of hurt, because that vision will destroy your hope. It's too big to see all at once. Instead, focus on the action you are taking by reading this book, and persist in your search for healing and hope.

I want you to know you are not alone on the path of heartache. It is easy to feel alone, especially in the middle of the night when fear magnifies suffering and minimizes God. Living through Saturday when you have no idea if a Sunday resurrection is coming to your life is a forlorn and forsaken place. I am convinced that the most powerful thing I offer clients is my presence during their suffering. Going it alone makes every difficulty worse. We need one another, and I am offering to come alongside you.

To assist your efforts, each chapter concludes with a meditative prayer that you can say aloud or read to yourself. A few of the prayers were written during my own times of heartache and modified for this book. They come from my heart to yours. Please receive them as a gift to unwrap and a reminder that the God of the universe hears your pain and is reaching out to you.

If you respond to distress by taking action or working harder, I've included small action steps that will move you one step in the healing process. Some of us like action steps and plans, and this part is for you. If you feel you can't take the steps, it's okay to read them and move on to the next chapter. Do what is most helpful to you. One size does not fit all.

Meditative Prayer

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day." Psalm 46:4–5

Lord, I have become negative. I see everything in light of the losses and pain in my world. Life has been more than difficult and more than overwhelming. And there may be more pain ahead. I'm struggling to recover physically. My world feels very sad today: broken dreams, unimaginable losses and disconnection from those who mean the most to me. It's been too, too much. But I want to

feel hopeful and positive and joyful again. I don't see how that is possible. Help me, Lord, to see your face in my life. I find great comfort in thinking of you not being shaken and that you never change and are eternally the same. My life shifts, but you are strong and true and loving and kind. I am your daughter/son and nothing—*nothing*—can take me from you or you from me. May I be able to absorb this truth. Amen.

Action Step

Write the following in your phone or on a 3" × 5" card:

Rely on truth, not feelings.

1. It is a fact that I survived _____. I may be a mess, but I survived, and *I refuse to give up now!*
2. Instead of telling God I have a big problem, I need to tell my problem that I have a BIG GOD.
3. I have decided, even though it is difficult to do, to consider my story to be a three-day story, and that means that a resurrection of some kind will happen.

