

Opening my Bible, I stared at the words. But my teary eyes refused to focus. “I can’t do this anymore, Lord,” I whispered, burying my face in the pillow. Outside the open window, a breeze blew and birds chattered in the trees. Neighborhood children laughed and played in their yard.

Gentle rays of soothing sunshine bathed the back of my body as I cried. But the comfort ended there. Inside, I remained untouched. Raw. Confused. For the very walls of protection I’d constructed over time to keep people out, also blocked the warm, healing light from entering my soul.

The constant, stabbing, abdominal pain I’d endured for months shot down my leg and worked its way up my side. I went from doctor to doctor. Maybe it was this. Maybe it was that. They tested, and I waited for the results, praying that perhaps this particular doctor might finally be able to determine what needed to be done to eliminate the pain.

Final diagnosis: pre-cancerous uterine cells, endometriosis and large cysts on both ovaries. Surgery, a complete pelvic reconstruction, took care of these problems. But complications left me unable to void completely without self-catheterization for a year. That led to muscle spasms and chronic bladder infections—at least one a month. At times I could barely stand.

I gave it my best, but my best came to an end. Sadness saturated my life. Controlling my emotions in public became almost impossible.

Truth often hurts. Like when we think about God’s omnipotence. He is all-powerful. He can instantly change our circumstances and resolve our pain. The Gospels are full of examples where Jesus simply spoke a word and people were healed, the dead raised.

The Bible promises that the Jesus Christ of the Gospels is the same today and that He doesn’t show favoritism. So why doesn’t He heal us when we ask? How can we have faith that God will answer our prayers when we pray repeatedly and nothing happens?

As my pain persisted, I asked God these questions. Frightening questions. Maybe even irreverent. And God answered.

He cares. He loves us so much and wants us to bring our doubts and struggles to Him moment by moment. *Lord, Get Your Needle—I'm Falling Apart at the Seams* relays my experience. Questions and answers. Progress and setbacks. Life and death.

As I walked this path, I took notes. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us that God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. I wanted to remember the pain. I wanted to remember what I needed throughout my physical, mental, and emotional struggles so I could minister to others in the future. And I wanted to remember God’s healing touch that penetrated my self-made walls and soothed my soul with peace and joy.

Helen Keller once said, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

I pray that you will feel the warmth of God’s arms around you as you work through these devotionals. That God will complete your healing in every way—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally—and that as He does, you will realize how very much He loves you and wants you to come to Him.

At the end of each devotional you will find suggestions for personal journal writing. Please allow God to search your heart as you take time to meditate on His promises and write about your feelings and needs. Be still, and allow God to speak comfort, encouragement, and wisdom to you. He longs to fellowship with you, strengthen your soul, and fill you with genuine hope for your future.

“The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them.”

Psalm 145:18-19



### A Running Stitch of Hope

“There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud.” Carl Sandburg

Chronic pain touches every part of our lives. All day. Every day. Life becomes an emotional roller coaster.

We are exhausted. Sick of fighting the doubt and discouragement that accompanies our unanswered prayers for healing. Tired of feeling guilty for having no peace.

Our strength is gone, and yet we know God’s Word commands us to be strong and take courage. But we don’t know how to find the strength God is talking about. We can’t fake it. The pressure of pain has crippled our faith, and we’ve learned to hide.

A world behind walls ... tolerable isolation. Emotional safety. We construct our refuge carefully, then burrow away—refusing to acknowledge or deal with issues buried deep within.

We shy away from family and friends, not sure we can trust them with our secret pain and heartache. We hide our feelings in private sanctuaries where only we know which key will unlock the door. A special song, a treasured picture, an intimate letter. Bridges to the memories and emotions now buried deep inside. Precious memories. Haunting memories. Memories held tightly, not to be shared.

Unfortunately, the walls we build inadvertently shut God out as well. When we see Him working in our lives, we open up and allow Him to bathe us in His love. But too often, when we can't decipher His plan, we incorrectly assume that He's not working, that He doesn't care, or that we can no longer trust Him.

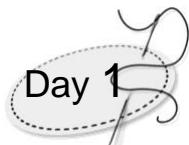
The good news is that, even in times like these, we *can* have hope. Hope built not on circumstances or what we see and feel. Rather, this hope is built solely on the promises of God.

And this hope will not disappoint us. It is greater than we can even imagine. A totally new kind of hope straight from God, who declares, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" Isaiah 55:9.

This week's studies introduce a hope that bursts through when we truly realize that we can do all things in God's strength. A hope that trumps circumstances and pain as we choose to accept the lifeline God throws us, climb out of the pit, and find shelter, safety, and security in His loving arms. (Okay . . . let's add *sanity*, too.)

This hope, more than mere desire, can withstand destructive powers. It is accompanied by expectation of obtainment and requires only that we continuously call to mind all that which God has promised us.

So, look up my dear friends. For "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" (Isaiah 40:31). This hope is available to you.



## THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD

"The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'"

Billy Graham

The phone rang, and I heard my husband answer. "She's sleeping. Can she call you back?"

I rolled over and wiped my eyes. Time to shove the feelings back down. Life had to go on. I couldn't sleep forever. "Oh, God," I prayed. "Please forgive me for not doing this trial right."

For months I'd waited as physicians ordered tests, coordinated their schedules, and finally settled on a surgery date.

It became tougher to pretend. To keep a smile on my face. To maintain a joyful Christian witness.

During this time a friend invited me to a women's retreat. I accepted, eager to spend time alone with the Lord.

On Saturday afternoon, several of us headed outdoors to trample through wild brush along the Mississippi River and savor the vibrant colors of the falling leaves and the pungent smell of wood burning fires.

At one point, our path ascended the side of a steep rocky hill. I followed the others, but soon decided I hurt too badly to make it to the top. When I told my friends I was heading back down, they begged me to continue. "One step at a time," they pleaded. "You can do this."

So I continued. I think I can . . . I think I can . . . I think I can.

And to my surprise, after a few more steps, the path took a sharp turn to the left, and I found myself at the peak of the hill in a rustic scenic overlook.

As we fastened our jackets against the nippy fall air and drank in the breathtaking view below, we spontaneously broke into prayer and songs of praise and worship.

That memory carried me through many a dark night over the next few years as I endured one surgery after another. So often, when I felt I'd reached my limit, I remembered those last few difficult steps on that rocky hill and my friends' encouraging words, "One step at a time. You can do this."

Trials come and go—two simple words with a mountain in the middle. And the mountain is all we know for sure. Jagged rock looms before us. Fatigue and discouragement settle in, and life appears hopeless.

When we can do no more, we become still, and God is able to speak into our lives. I know you can . . . I know you can . . . I know you can.

Suddenly, a fresh burst of hope shoots through our soul. For God has promised that in His strength, we can do all things.

God understands our need to rest in the valley, to strengthen our spiritual muscles in a climb, and to be rejuvenated in His presence at the pinnacle.

So we continue, in God's strength, until He says we've gone far enough. Then the path will end—leaving us at a higher level than ever before. New challenges. New blessings. Closer to God. And ever so thankful we didn't give up.

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Hebrews 12:1b-2a

Writing from the Heart

*Healing...from the Inside Out*



How can focusing only on the steep, jagged rock in front of us bring us down mentally and emotionally?

What could we focus on instead? Be specific.

How could trusting that God's strength will sustain us to the top help make our climb easier?