

DARE TO

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JULIA LOREN



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JULIA LOREN



WHITAKER  
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# 1

## LAYING HOLD OF HOPE BEYOND REASON

*Julia Loren*

*“The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed  
and restore him from his bed of illness.”*

—Psalm 41:3 (NIV)

**T**hose who receive healing always grab hold of a measure of faith when a particular Scripture leaps off the page and into their hearts, or in a moment when the Holy Spirit speaks directly to their hearts in prayer, or by way of someone else’s faith, one who has received a word of knowledge or inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Faith is key to receiving healing. Faith for healing arises when you hold onto either your own faith or another person’s faith. Those who receive healing almost always first receive a gift of faith, which the current of heaven rides upon to wash away pain and disease.

Faith is the container of “hope beyond reason”—the expectation of unseen things coming to pass. Faith is ignited in a community that welcomes the presence of the Lord. Faith receives the power of God, who loves you.

*The following thoughts on faith and hope are from my book When God Says Yes.*

When I see extraordinary miracles in the lives of the people I meet, I hear a common theme of events that contributed to their healing. First, they received bad news. Then they received personal, specific words from the Lord that contradicted the death sentence and infused them with hope. And throughout the long ordeal that tested their faith, others helped them hold onto a hope beyond reason.

The following stories are about two very different individuals who entered into a hope beyond reason, felt the support of a loving community, and received a miraculous healing. One is an American pastor who was healed of leukemia. The other is an African woman living in Rome, Italy, who was healed of acute depression and psychotic episodes that she was prone to under the weight of grief. I include their stories because cancer and depression claim more lives than we care to admit. The testimonies of their healings speak to all those who have physical or mental illness that seems incurable. Nothing is incurable for Jesus. He who created us can uncreate disease and re-create health, giving us all that we need for life. Our Creator is the God of the miraculous.

Dave Hess is one of the most unassuming, soft-spoken, humble men I have ever met. Pastor of a large church in Pennsylvania, he and his family walked down a long road of debilitating illness and recovery several years ago. I sobbed my way through his book *Hope Beyond Reason*, which tells the story of his ordeal. I cried not out of sadness. Yes, the book detailed a lot of grief and pain I cannot imagine enduring, but it was far from sad. Rather, I cried because of the beauty this book revealed about faith, hope, and love. Dave's faith, as he held onto the promises of God, revealed an amazing desire to live. His family and the community of his church constantly held out hope and interceded night and day for several months. Their intercessions created an atmosphere of faith that not only broke through for Dave's healing, but released a breakthrough ministry of healing throughout the church.

What brought tears to my eyes most often was the beautiful love story he wove through his book. The love between husband and wife, father and children, pastor and church, God and man splashed out from the pages and washed over me as I read. The brief synopsis of his story that I include here

gives but a glimpse into how one man held onto a handful of promises and received the miraculous provision of healing.

Immediately after Dave Hess was given the news that he had advanced leukemia and needed to enter the hospital immediately, Dave heard the Lord give him a promise that implied he would not die, but would live. As he drove home to tell his family about the diagnosis the doctor had given him, he sensed the Lord speaking words of hope out of Hosea chapter 2. Here is Dave's story:

*I will allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak kindly to her. Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth.*

(Hosea 2:14–15 NASB)

In this valley of tears, that same Lord was opening a door of hope for me.

As I turned the corner of our street and drove toward the house, I noticed a number of cars in our driveway. Opening the door from the garage, I was welcomed by a kitchen filled with family and friends. Waves of love broke over me as I walked through the door. My parents-in-law were there, along with my sister-in-law Robin. Our friend Karna and our youth pastor Tom had also rallied to the call. Upon hearing a vague report that something might be wrong, they had dropped everything to stand with us in prayer. A cavalcade of phone calls was already alerting others to pray. Within a few short hours, a small army was sounding the battle cry.

Questioning looks encircled the room. I wanted to give all of them answers. But glimpsing at the faces of Sheri and the children, I drew them aside to tell them first.

Crouching to look at them eye-to-eye, I heard myself say, "Daddy has cancer. But Jesus has Daddy."

Together we melted into one big hug, mixed with tears. We felt hands on our heads and shoulders as those we love lifted us up to the One who loves. We embraced one another, and we sensed His embrace.

A few days later, reflecting on this moment, I would write these words in my journal:

What a whirlwind this has been. Yet, what a wonderful “eye” in this storm. Promises abound in this time. Scriptures and personal words keep coming to me with the constant and sweet reminding of the Holy Spirit. There is a door of Hope in this valley of troubling! I am watching as the Lord wars against my demonic enemies (Nahum 1:2–6). At the same time, He is fortifying me with His peace, His faith, and His presence (Nahum 1:7–10). Keep rejoicing!

Habakkuk 3:19 in the *Amplified Bible* says:

*The Lord God is my strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army. . . and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility].*

That night I slept like a child, safe in the arms of my Father. He is my strength. He is my personal bravery. He is my invincible army. I will not stand still in terror. Instead, I will make spiritual progress upon my high places of trouble. These words ran through my mind and out of my mouth.

For the next six months, Dave lived mostly in the hospital as he battled the cancer. Twice, the doctors said he had only hours to live. Twice, Dave stepped away from death and back into life. During his weakest moments of faith, God released others with the right word to restore his hope beyond reason. Dave tells of one such meeting:

One day a thirteen-year-old girl named Mary stepped into our lives. She had urged her mother to bring her to the hospital to see us, saying she had something she needed to tell us. Mary had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer earlier that year. A large tumor had been removed, yet doctors were uncertain about her chances for a full recovery. One day while reading her Bible, Mary came across this verse in Psalms:

*I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done*  
(Psalm 118:17).

It spoke hope to her in her valley of trouble. Here she stood beside my bed, cancer-free. The tumor was gone and Mary's life had been restored. She lived, and she was telling me what the Lord had done. Mary held out a handwritten note card with Psalm 118:17 printed on it. "I hung this by my bed when I was in the hospital," she said with a sparkle in her eyes. "It gave me hope. I want you to have hope, too. You're not going to die. You're going to live, too!"

Then she prayed for us. Her words were pure expressions of trust, voiced to a God she had found to be trustworthy.

With a confident smile, Mary looked at me and said once more, "You will not die. You will live. And you will tell everyone what the Lord has done."

After Mary and her mother left the room, Sheri opened the mail. Included in all the expressions of support were *five* cards with Psalm 118:17 written in them. The Lord's faithful promises were calling us to a deeper place of trust! "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done."

Together we laughed. It was not the laughter of a humorous diversion. Rather it was a confident laughter, given to us as a gift from the Lord, born out of the relief that comes from knowing we can trust Him. He was showering us with reminders of His strong presence to sustain us. The Bible frequently says the Lord brings confirmation through two or three witnesses. We had received a word confirmed by six witnesses! I guess we needed all of them.

While Dave battled in the hospital, his church battled on the home front. It has been said that nothing happens unless we pray; and that God moves mountains in response to prayers of faith. But I also believe that there is a hidden truth in the psalmist's words in Psalm 133:1–3, that where brethren dwell together in unity—there the oil runs freely down the faces of the prayer warriors, cascading joyfully out the door like the swollen streams of winter's melting snowpack, spilling over onto the streets, and running into the

byways and hospitals and even to nations far beyond the walls of any church building. Dave relates how his congregation stepped into a unity of spirit that released both the prophetic and healing anointing oil in their midst:

On her way home that evening, Sheri noticed that the lights were on at the church and the parking lot was filled with cars. She knew of no scheduled meeting, so she pulled in, curious to see what was going on. As she entered the sanctuary, she was amazed to see hundreds of people engaged in prayer.

At the front of the church was our dear friend Dawn Sweigart leading the charge. Dawn had surrendered her life to Jesus just a few years prior. She had come to Him with a wide-open heart that seemed to blossom overnight. She was a leader, an influencer, a motivator and a budding prophet. She heard the voice of the Lord and sensed His heartbeat in an extremely unique way. She expressed it in an equally distinctive way. We deeply loved her.

Just moments after learning the news of my illness, she rallied hundreds of people from our church and our region to pray. As a young follower of Jesus, Dawn had taken hold of His promises with tenacity. If He said He would do miracles, then He would do miracles! If He said we would do greater works than He did (John 14:12), then we will do greater works than He did! Her heart throbbed with the conviction that He will make His promises a reality in our day!

Dawn had organized round-the-clock prayer for us. People volunteered to pray for an hour each week, collectively covering all 168 hours of the week. Local pastors and their congregations joined us, and various prayer gatherings spontaneously sprang up in response to the needs of the moment and the Holy Spirit's leading. This is what Jesus said His Church would look like. More than buildings, organizations, politics or programs, He builds His Church with people. He draws those who are being rescued and restored, as well as those now devoting their lives to rescuing and restoring others.

There is nothing more beautiful on the planet than when followers of Jesus act like Jesus. On the other hand, there is nothing more

grievous than when believers in Jesus don't even resemble Him. Some like to throw stones at the Church in moments like these, seeing her as detestable. Out of touch. Past her prime. But as author Fawn Parish quips, "The Church is like Noah's ark. It stinks but it's the only thing afloat." She goes on to say, "When we criticize the Church, we are criticizing something Jesus adores and spilled His blood for. It is His own precious possession."

Night after night these prayer warriors met. Often sharing in communion, they would declare the power of Jesus' victory over sin, sickness, death and all of the forces of hell. They spent hours together worshiping, encouraging one another and interceding.

But they were not just praying for me. They were asking the Lord to touch every life in our region and beyond!

Faith and fervency erupted in people's hearts throughout the congregation. Many who did not see themselves as prayer warriors boldly enlisted in this holy war. It was an all-out fight for the hearts and lives of those in our territory. Mindful of the eternal consequences, we continue to pray for every orphaned heart to know and receive the love of their Father through His amazing Son, Jesus!

What could have intimidated us ignited us.

Fresh doors of hope were being opened in this valley of trouble.

Just when it seemed that the leukemia was in remission, the medical treatments caused Dave's body to react in such a way that Dave almost died—for a second time. Once again, Dave and Sheri stood and declared the promises of God, and once again, Dave stepped away from the door of death and back to the door of hope. But they still had a ways to go through the valley of trouble.

One day, Dave's appendix burst, and due to his weakened condition, doctors determined that they could not operate. They told Sheri that Dave will surely die. However, Dave had been given other promises, divine encounters with prayer, and knew that he would not die. At one point, healing evangelist Randy Clark came to his hospital and prayed an unusual prayer—not just for healing of the leukemia, but for the healing of his abdominal area. At the

time, it seemed unusual. But when Dave's appendix burst, Randy's prayer became another promise to hold onto.

The doctors told Sheri that no one lived longer than a couple of horrendously painful days with a burst appendix. They could not operate due to Dave's weakened condition and decided to send him home with hospice care to die in the company of his family. But his family and friends continued to hold onto the promises of healing, and Dave continued to survive:

Finally, after six weeks, my blood levels were restored. With white cells, red cells and platelets in healthy balance, I met with the surgeon to prepare for surgery.

"I've looked over your charts," he said. "You've had a ruptured appendix inside you for over six weeks. I'm going to do an exploratory procedure on you because I'm not sure what we will find. The poison that is secreted from a burst appendix is highly toxic. We need to see what damage has been done to your internal organs."

Grateful to be alive, I underwent surgery the next morning. As I nodded off, counting backwards at the direction of the anesthetist, I remembered Jesus' promise to me. *You are a shield around me*, I said to Him as I drifted off into an anesthetic fog.

Later in the recovery room, the surgeon greeted Sheri and me. His first words to us were exclamations of amazement: "I've never seen anything like this!" Holding up four snapshots, he said, "Look at these pictures!"

They were pictures of my insides. In 5x7 glossy prints. Suitable for framing.

"Here," he said, pointing at one of the photos, "is your appendix, or what is left of it. Amazingly, it is encased inside a tent-like structure that completely encompasses your appendix! Did you ever have an operation in this part of your body?" he asked.

"Not that I remember," I responded. "Why do you ask?"

"Because this tent is composed of adhesions. It's the strongest type of scar tissue your body can manufacture. This kind of scar tissue only appears after someone has had surgery! It appears to have been in

place before your appendix ruptured. All of the poison was contained inside it," he said, while making a circular gesture on the photo. "Not a drop of poison escaped this tent. Your entire internal system is as healthy as that of a twenty year old!" *What a compliment!* I thought.

Bewildered, relieved, grateful and amazed, I asked him, "What did this tent of adhesions look like?"

"That's the funniest thing," he said curiously. "It looked like a group of shields that had been sewn together!"

Just as He promised, so He had done. The Lord had miraculously created a miracle pouch. A tent of shields. Grabbing my Bible, I opened once again to the passage containing His timely word to us. I marvel at it to this day.

*Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." But you are a shield around me, O LORD (Psalm 3:2-3).*

Just as God shielded Dave from death, God covers us all with His shield of salvation. Many say of those with fatal illness that God will not deliver them. Even those who struggle with chronic mental illness are deemed incurable by man or by God. Yet, holding onto the promises of God—despite evidence to the contrary—increases faith. When others draw near in love (rather than in unbelief), miracles happen. Community becomes the container of faith that holds us and shields us from the enemy's schemes. Community releases the love that empowers us to continue to hold onto hope beyond reason. Dave's family joined forces with a church community that did not waver in unbelief. And Dave was completely healed. More than ten years later, Dave remains healthy, without a trace of cancer.

While God can move and does move in response to our faith alone, the healing power seems most quickly released when a community of believers stands with the one in need.

## ***Community—the Container of Hope***

I first noticed this amplified healing response of community while speaking at a women's retreat in Rome, Italy, some years ago. When I came in

contact with another woman who was in desperate need of healing, I noticed that the miracle she received came as a result of a community drawing her into their circle of love and interceding for her day and night. This kind of love seems rare in our western culture. Perhaps that is why God modeled it for me in the African community long before I was able to see it modeled through the Pennsylvania church in Dave Hess's story.

Elsie shuffled into the retreat, accompanied by two other African women, her eyes obviously deadened by a powerful antipsychotic. She was suicidal. Her whole world shattered when her boyfriend abandoned her and state child protection authorities took her infant daughter away until she could regain her sanity. Her African "sisters" brought her to this retreat held at an oceanside community near Rome, Italy, in hopes that God would touch her and make her whole.

Only they knew what had really happened to Elsie in her past. I could only guess what leads an African woman to leave her country, family, and friends for a foreign land to earn enough money to send home and sustain, perhaps, the whole village. Poverty, sexual abuse, war, and the threat of AIDS probably all contributed to her arrival in Italy, where she worked as a domestic employee in a land prejudiced against her. The stress of moving to another country is enough to unsettle anyone. Add a string of traumas occurring both before and after the move, and that pressure would challenge the coping ability of even the toughest individual. It was no surprise that Elsie's ability to cope had shattered into a million pieces.

After her breakdown, doctors on a hospital mental ward told her she was suffering from major depression with psychotic features. They stabilized her with heavy doses of medication and, several weeks later, said she could go home. Once Elsie was released from the hospital, her African friends, her sisters, took her in, watched over her, prayed for her, and drew her nearer to the fires of God's love.

After several months of watching and praying over her night and day, they brought her with them to this retreat on the outskirts of Rome, by the sea, where the pastors of a large Assemblies of God church in Rome had invited me to speak....It was here in Italy that I met Elsie and stood in awe of God, watching His presence move powerfully, healing her and many other women from depression and anxiety during the retreat and in the weeks

following. It was here that I came to understand the demonic component of depression and despair and watched God shatter the “spirit of despair” in the lives of many, freeing them to dance in the fullness of joy.

Elsie was one of the first to be healed. She stood for prayer, and as I made my way down the line, she stared straight ahead as if completely unaware of what was happening. Either that or she was scared to death. I didn’t even know if she spoke English, but I noticed that no one translated for her into either an African or Italian language. I paused before her, raised my hand to her forehead, and before I could utter a word, she crumbled to the floor. During both the evening and morning sessions, she stood for prayer and immediately fell into a deeper encounter with the presence of God. Each time I walked on, wondering what she felt, wondering if she just fell down out of preconditioned expectation. I felt nothing. Jet lag diminished the sense of God’s presence, and I just went through the motions of speaking and praying, confident that the women were receiving something of God’s power and presence and prophetic words. What I felt was of no consequence. What they felt was!

The afternoon session was devoted initially to testimonies of what God was doing in individual lives so far. Two women shared freely. Then Elsie abruptly shuffled up to me. Many in the audience stiffened, afraid that she would disrupt the meeting with insane chatter. As I held the microphone for her, she testified in fairly clear English the story of her fall into sin, the trauma of losing her baby to the state, her salvation, and her sense of God’s presence healing her that weekend. Her African sisters sat listening, wiping tears from their eyes. For indeed, a change had come over Elsie—her eyes were clearer, and her speech, though tainted by medication, showed clarity of thought and a logical flow of content as she told her saga.

Her descent into depression originated in loneliness that led her into a relationship with a man who used her sexually—with no thought of love or commitment. As a result, she became pregnant. And when she gave birth, the authorities took away her child. It sounds similar to what David and Bathsheba experienced in 2 Samuel 11–12. The problems of illicit sex, unresolved relationship issues, and unrepentant affairs always open the soul to the spirit of despair. However, God was out to destroy the works of the enemy and redeem Elsie’s life from the pit, despite her having to walk through the consequences of her choices.

I stood beside Elsie and noticed many Europeans squirm in their seats while she spoke. When she finished, I simply prayed, “Father, we hear her story as a confession of how she has sinned and how You are redeeming her. Now we as representatives of the Church forgive her, and You forgive her. Release her into the complete healing You have for her. Destroy the work of the evil one that seeks to rob her of the fullness of life and joy and peace.”

At that, her eyes rolled back in her head until all I could see was solid white. Rustling in the seats drew my attention, and I nodded at a couple of her sisters to come up. They took her to a corner of the room and quietly delivered her of the unclean spirit that had attached itself to her during this traumatic phase of grief and loss.

On the following Wednesday night, I spoke at a large meeting in Rome and saw Elsie waiting at the door.

“Elsie! What has happened? You look so full of joy!”

“Oh, Julia,” she replied, “I got very sick when I left the retreat and had to go to hospital. The doctor told me that they had to get me off all medication quickly. I am healed.”

Indeed, she was.

A year later, the Italian authorities refused to release her child to her custody. She fell into a depression for a short while. However, she had spent the year growing in her relationship with God and living in community with people who loved and cared for her, draping the garments of salvation around her shoulders on a daily basis. Her depression lifted quickly as she realized that “*hope deferred makes the heart sick*” (Proverbs 13:12 NKJV), and she sought Jesus for healing. She walked through this period without medication, nor did she require hospitalization. She is fine today, coping without falling into depression...despite her challenging circumstances.

Dave Hess, Elsie, and many others have received healing in the company of others. It is the nature of God to enable the body to “build itself up in love.” When people come together, God is present in their midst. The enemy knows this, and so he moves in like a lion targeting its prey to cut it off from the rest of the herd so he can close in and kill.

Each one in these stories listened for the promise of the Lord specific to their need and declared it over themselves—or others declared it over them in intercession. Faith stirred in someone's life, and God rushed in to meet it, for God is attracted more to faith than to unbelief.

## ***God Will Heal All of Your Diseases***

Jesus doesn't want the evil one to succeed in destroying you. He wants to destroy the enemy's power over you that manifests in your life as depression and anxiety. His love for you leads you to understand that you can run to Jesus rather than hide in isolation. His love for you is even now breaking off the spirit of despair that so often accompanies long-term illness.

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit; who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.*  
(Psalm 103:2–5 NASB)

According to this passage in Psalms 103, He will heal all your diseases, redeem your life from the pit of depression and anxiety, release an overwhelming sense of His love and kindness toward you, and increase your understanding of His compassion. It is part of the package called salvation.

God's Word, the Bible, is full of promises that speak of entering into the fullness of salvation. Every time I read it, God seems to make the words come alive. God speaks personally to me—through His Word and through the Word quickened to my spirit. When you are walking through the valley of trouble, reading the Word will reveal the door of hope. It will also break through any self-defeating thoughts that seek to hinder your healing and rob your joy.

Lest you think that miracles of healing are only for special people, let me assure you that you, too, are special. Made in the image of God, you are a child of God. His delight is in you. He does not will that anyone should suffer or be ill. If you doubt that, listen to what Dave Hess has to say about the lessons he learned in the midst of his illness.

Somewhere along the line, we have been lied to. We were told that God sends us sickness to teach us a lesson. At the same time, we were told He doesn't do miracles anymore, that He somehow "got it out of His system" when Jesus walked the earth. In fact, this lie went so far as to say if someone claims to have experienced a miracle, Satan probably had something to do with it.

I pondered this for a moment.

God gives us diseases? And Satan works miracles?

What a clever con!

This miracle we were experiencing was not a rare occurrence. In fact, what we call miracles, He calls normal. When Jesus said signs and wonders would follow those who believe Him, He did not use the word *occasionally*. And I was not getting special treatment simply because I was a pastor. He promises to give good gifts to all His children. He doesn't show partiality. He is not a shifty carnival worker who occasionally lets someone win in order to keep the rest of the customers at the counter. Though we have tried to change Him, He has not changed. He is still the God of miracles. He is still the One with Whom nothing is impossible. Nothing is too hard for Him! We can trust Him. We can hope in Him. Not because we are gullible, but because He is believable!

Dave and Elsie received specific promises from the Lord for healing. The promises they held onto are for you, too.

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## Journey into Word & Spirit

1. What Scripture from this chapter stood out to you? Write it down as a reminder of the promise that God has given specifically to you.
2. Is there a person in your life who is standing with you in prayer? Or, do you know of a person who will stand with you in prayer if requested? Why not ask him or her to do so?

3. Has there been a specific moment on your journey toward health and healing when God has intervened and given you hope? What happened? Be specific.
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Chapter excerpted from Julia Loren, *When God Says Yes: His Promise and Provision When You Need It Most* (Grand Rapids: MI: Chosen Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 80–94. Used by permission. The portion in italics at the beginning was added by the writer for this publication.

### *About the Author*

Julia Loren is a prolific writer who has authored more than a dozen books, as well as many poems and short stories. She earned a bachelor of arts degree in journalism from the University of Washington and a master's degree in counseling and psychology from Seattle Pacific University. Since her early professional days as a journalist, she has channeled her skills into helping people to realize their gifts and to walk in their God-given destinies.

Julia is a sought-after speaker at community events and churches, and she conducts writing workshops throughout the year. She resides north of Seattle, Washington, and takes frequent trips to the sunny shores of California.

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