

an
unclouded
Sun

BRENDA D. VANWINKLE

A decorative flourish consisting of intricate, symmetrical scrollwork and floral patterns, rendered in a light gray color, positioned below the author's name.

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Dedication



For my husband, Jim.
For my children and grandchildren.
My heart is yours.
Live bravely. Love fully.
Live free.

Dedicated to my sister,
the most amazing Deborah I know.

In honor and loving memory of my Mom,
Jane Elizabeth Williams Dixon.
Even now, you are my inspiration.

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Forward



As soon as I began to read this book, I experienced memories and thoughts being stirred up within me. I love books that do this. This is a book that will both encourage you with what is written, but will also remind you of your own memories, stories, and testimonies through which you can also find encouragement!

This book could easily be titled *Finding Your Song*. What songs do best is what the early pages of this book did for me: evoked a memory and began to sing an encouraging melody to me.

The first memory this book brought to mind was of a lady I met whose niece had just been told her unborn baby was hydrocephalic (water on the brain). I prayed with her and gave her a word from God that the family should name the baby. Little did I know that the lady's brother, the grandfather-to-be, composed songs over each of his grand-children. The song that would be composed for this unborn baby was to be a supernatural song of hope. I learned later that the baby was named Judah, and he was born completely healthy!

Much like that song sung over an unborn baby, I believe that this book will sing over you and bring you identity, hope, and purpose. The things yet to be born will come to life within you and bring forth life and health.

The chapter titled "Unstoppable Song of Hope" is the song everyone needs to hear—the song that so many are desperately

searching for in our world today. Hope, when found, is unstoppable. Paul says in Romans 5, “Hope does not disappoint.” This book is a call to not just—in the words of the author—have a message, but live a message. A lived out message has the power to transform the world around you.

The other reminder I received while reading this book was a phrase I wrote some years ago: “Hope is the sketch on the canvas which invites the master painter to complete the painting.” This book will cause you to get your pencils and paper out and start sketching.

So many of my favorite bible characters are unveiled in this book in such a way that makes hope tangible for everyone, and not simply the vantage point of the unreachable “great” saints. Hope is for all of us who are indeed the saints that all of scripture writes about.

Throughout the reading of this book, hope’s diluted meaning—of being about chance—will be erased, and replaced with real meaning. Diluted hope has made it essential that true hope be rediscovered. My favorite verse in the book of Job is 5:16, “When the helpless find hope, unrighteousness must shut its mouth.” What power hope has! What power this book has! When unrighteousness is silenced, there is only one voice: the voice of righteousness.

This book, this song of hope, will silence the lyrics of hopelessness and replace them with hope: hope in who you are and what you are alive for. It will release the song of righteousness in your life, family, and sphere of influence

Paul Manwaring

*Author of What On Earth Is Glory
and Kisses From A Good God (to be released October 1, 2012)*



Hope. Hope. Hope. Hope.

Hope is your lifeline.

*Hope is the abiding pressure of Presence
that will keep you heading toward your goal.*

Your dream is not too big. Hope.

The longing is able to be fulfilled. Hope.

*What you now consider a huge, out-there goal
will one day be a historical fact and a Kingdom reality.*

Keep hoping.

*It's time. It's time to believe bigger than ever before,
to rejoice higher and deeper
than you've ever known joy before,
to pull on your courage and go for the gold.*

Don't stop hoping.

Hope remains. Hope does not disappoint.

Introduction



Few things captivate the imagination like a full moon. Legends are written and songs sung about them, and in all the eons gone by, humankind has looked to the night sky, in awe of the splendor of lights displayed there. I am with abundant company when I am amazed at how a full moon lights up an otherwise black night.

Yet as glorious as it is, the fullest of moons cannot begin to compare to a sunrise. Whether we remain awake throughout a sleepless night or a night of celebration, the glimmer of hope that sunrise brings with the breaking of dawn lets us know: today is a new start. Hope is rising like the dawn, and God's brand new mercy will light my path this day.

The miracle of sunrise is hope. The promise of the Lord is that, day after day, as long as life on earth continues, the sun will rise in the morning. (Genesis 8:22)

My purpose in writing this book is to express what I've learned about hope — hope as dependable as the sunrise and as sure as the dawn. I have read thousands of books in my lifetime (at least it seems) and heard as many sermons. Many of them have taught me about the Christian faith and God's love. Very few have given me insight or understanding of hope. I have attempted to bring that understanding in these pages. I have demonstrated, using Biblical texts and personal stories, that hope is both present and attainable, no matter how difficult or trying one's circumstance.

“We live in a day of great anxiety and terror.” That statement or one with the same meaning is spoken or implied often these days. Yet looking back through the history of our human existence, has there ever been a time when this has not been true? I propose not. In whatever time God ordains a person to live, that person must face fear and hopelessness in one way or another. (Acts 17:26)

Perhaps that is one of the reasons Holy Spirit inspired Paul to state clearly in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that faith, hope, and love will all remain. Remain forever. For always. Throughout the joys and trials of each generation. Many of us have been taught and believe that Love will remain, for God is love. The 1990’s brought a heavy emphasis on faith teaching. Faith will always be, as Jesus is our faith. He is the author and finisher of it (Hebrews 12:2), and He is the substance of what we hoped for.

Where does that leave hope itself?

While I have lived my life with great anticipation of good, my understanding of hope — the nature and substance of it — was reduced to a pie-in-the-sky wish, a dream of something I couldn’t quite lay hold of but longed to experience. Hope felt more like a birthday wish kept secret when I blew out the candles on my cake: after all, if I made my hope known, it wouldn’t come true.

The Word of God tells us that the Holy Spirit enables us to have enough hope that it overflows. Romans 15:13 reads:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

Through these scriptures we see the Trinity working in divine tandem to keep faith, hope and love available to us always.

Let’s face it: we live in a day of great anxiety and terror. I welcome you into this journey of exploring hope, finding hope, maintaining

hope. In these pages we'll discover together that the Bible describes Jesus in terms of the rising sun, accessible and without clouds to dim the warmth of His presence. I long to know Him in this way. After all, better than a wish tossed up to the man in the moon is a relationship with One Whose lovers are like an unclouded sun.

ONE

*Honey On My
Lips*

*The bee is more honored than other animals, not
because she labors, but because she labors for others.*

Saint John Chrysostom

*B*ees deserve whatever reputation they've been given,
if you ask me.

In nearly all regards, bees are honorable little creatures. Bees are beautiful, a naturally occurring engineering marvel. They are necessary: just by doing what comes naturally, they pollinate flowers, thereby providing fruits and vegetables for us. Bees are persistent. Ever try to chase one away that is fascinated by your cologne? We make movies about their lives, and the honey that they produce is one of the purest foods on the planet. To those who have worked long and hard to accomplish a goal, we offer the compliment, "You've been busy as a bee!" Most anyone who

knows anything about them considers the bee a great asset to our world. Yes, bees have a wonderful reputation except for one little thing: make a bee angry and it will sting.

The Bee

Deborah was the name she'd been given. This name, which means "bee," seems to fit what we read of her. One who is busy all the time. One who gathers a little from here and a little from there to create sweetness for others to enjoy. One who, when challenged, can sting.

It seemed she had inherited from her parents the ability to look at a matter and see beyond her natural vision into another, deeper level of reality. Seeing other women her age content to raise children and take care of the home front, Deborah was confronted daily with her own dissatisfaction. While happy for their contentment, her own seemed out of reach. Life was good, and everything in her society told her she should be satisfied, but something was stirring inside of her, longing to be released. Always busy doing one project after another, Deborah soon gained a reputation as a woman to be counted on in time of need or distress. Not only did she listen to others and care for them, but she seemed to have wisdom far beyond her years and training. Deborah could see things that no one else could see, and when confronted with a problem, she had the ability to listen beyond spoken words and recognize the pain and confusion behind them. Deborah could get to the heart of the issue because Deborah knew the heart of God.

Sometimes, like a bee, her words stung as they penetrated the surface lie and exposed the motive or shame that lay covered and hidden. A happy person by nature, her quick wit was her trademark. Anyone in the vicinity of her home could hear her happily humming



a tune as she kept busy, her boundless energy flowing from her lips as she sang and her hands as she served.

Yet, no matter how much she gave herself to serving others — preparing meals for the ill and elderly or lending an ear to her neighbor’s woes, Deborah sensed that there was more: more for her to do, more of an impact her life was meant to make, more of her God to experience.

Deborah knew that there had to be *more*.

A Story for Today

The above description is not biblically accurate, but rather one of the scenarios I have imagined about Deborah’s life, from the story of Deborah in the Bible book of Judges. I have looked for stories about Deborah in multiple bookstores, and I can tell you: she’s hard to find. Looking through books specifically dedicated to telling stories of women of the Bible, I’ve been shocked that many of them don’t mention Deborah at all, and if they do, their take on her life is weak at best. A few books specifically recount Deborah’s important role as a general in the Biblical book of Judges. Many of them offer great insights about how we, too, can live in boldness and confidence, but I’ve never found a book specifically written to express how Deborah’s life and story apply to us today in a post 9-11 world. Even though detailed information about Deborah is limited, I know this: she lived in a day when terror gripped the land. In fact, the book of Judges, Chapter 5, tells us that the people were so afraid that they traveled back roads rather than the highways, and that village life had ceased. Despite widespread fear and terrorism, Deborah was able to hear the heart of God and to understand what it would take to defeat terrorism and turn her nation back to God. Together with the leader of the armed forces and a humble

ironworker's wife, Deborah defeated the Osama bin Laden of her day, and even better, played a key role in bringing revival and rest to her land. This sounds like a woman who knew something valuable that could help us here and now.

The characters in Deborah's story are worth closer examination. We can be inspired by Deborah's bravery in the face of terrorism. Barak, the general with whom she planned the enemy's defeat, is usually made out to be the wimp of the story, but we'll look at another possibility in a later chapter. And we mustn't dismiss Jael, the nomad. To describe her as "just a woman" doesn't cut it. She was, in fact, like most of us, minding her own business and living her day-to-day life when terror arrived at her door. Nothing in the story gives any indication that she was looking for a way to make a name for herself, nor does it appear that she was looking to be a heroine. Yet, in the normal course of her life, terror literally came to her house, and she had the courage and wisdom to know what to do. Today, when terror arrives — whether in the form of divorce, untimely death, sickness, runaway children, or any other — I want to learn from these three characters how to deal with it and find hope once again.

The Name Game

To say that William Shakespeare had a way with words is a bit like saying that Mt. Everest is a tall mountain — a vast understatement at best. Imagine that, like Shakespeare, the words you write would be memorized and recognized centuries later! Many years have passed since I was required to memorize passages from Shakespeare's work in high school, yet to this day I can quote passages that were profound enough to have stayed with me all these years. One such passage is from *Romeo and Juliet*. The lovers are discussing the fact that even though their families are long-time rivals, their family



names should not stand in the way of their love for one another. There in this discourse is the famous line, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 1-2).

I know that Shakespeare was technically right, but the fact is that roses are now associated with particular characteristics. When people hear the word “rose,” they think of love and romance and a fragrance that transports them to memories associated with the pleasure of being loved. A dozen long-stemmed roses are costly, and when we think of buying or receiving a dozen long-stemmed roses, we know that a sacrifice has been made to express friendship or love. I’m sure that if I chose to call the roses planted around my house “skunk weed” or “trash essence,” their perfume would not change and they would smell as sweet as they do now, but the mere mention of the name “rose” carries a world of emotion and memory and hope. I’d venture to say that if you told a friend or loved one that you were sending a gift of trash weed, the response would be quite different from the one you’d receive by announcing a gift of roses.

Names do matter.

There’s Something About That Name

In the west, we don’t choose our own names; They are chosen for us by our parents. It’s not easy to legally change our names, either. What if you are given a name that doesn’t fit you or that you don’t like? What is a “good name?”

I remember being given a “new name” by my dear mentor, Pat Bailey. I met Pat when my husband Jim and I moved to Missouri to attend Bible School in the early 1980’s. Much of the baggage I took with me was not in boxes or suitcases; rather, it was the junk in my

emotions and soul that had been gathering over the course of my lifetime. Oh, I loved Jesus as much as I could, and I longed to be like Him. Shall we just suffice it to say that we're all on a journey toward being like Him but haven't yet arrived?

At that time, I'd always been a person who saw the world in black or white; no gray allowed. I had a strong sense of justice and clearly marked divisions between right and wrong. (Anyone with a prophetic gift knows what I'm talking about!) I knew I was too hard on myself and others but hadn't yet grown or matured enough in my own identity to deal well with these "righteous" emotions. Pat loved me as I was, and amazingly, as she began speaking life and hope to me, I began to change and heal.

One night she called me on the phone, and when I picked up she said, "Well, hello, Grace and Mercy!" I was furious! I was sure she was making fun of me (since grace and mercy were what I married in Jim, not what I'd yet become), and I hung up the phone. It wasn't long until I had Momma Pat on my doorstep. The first thing she said was never to hang up the phone on her. The second was like warm, healing honey being poured on the raw edges of my ragged identity: "I didn't call you that to mock you. I called you Grace and Mercy because God told me that's what He is forming in you." I repented, Pat forgave me, and from that day on I never forgot that God had named me something I never would have named myself. I had new hope — hope to become someone better, something more.

My Name Means "Forgive"

Over the course of the years we have worked in Asia, Jim and I have gathered to us many whom we consider our spiritual sons and daughters, and also many who look to us as spiritual parents. Fred



is one of those.

A gentle, unimposing young man, Fred behaved as though his life had been rather happy and easy. One day, as he and I were visiting at a picnic table while waiting for Jim to join us, I asked him about his name. He explained what it meant and then told me that he changed his name from the one his parents gave him at birth. Surprised by this, I asked him why.

In his own humble, honoring way, he told me bits and pieces of a childhood filled with physical beatings and verbal abuse, all at the hand and voice of his dad. Peaceful, gentle Fred was a disappointment to his dad, and often heard about it. Then one day, long before meeting Jesus, Fred heard about the concept of forgiveness and decided that it was what he must do if he were to have any peace in his mind and soul. He changed his name, he told me, so that each time he wrote it or heard it called out he would be reminded of the choice he had made. His new name defined his hope for a new beginning. The name he chose for himself: One Who Forgives Often.

Each of us was given a name by our parents, the legal name by which we are known. Yet each of us has also been called numerous other names throughout our life journey — some of them helpful and encouraging, others not so much. Our names matter. Not only do they help identify us in the minds and conversations of others, but the name we give ourselves – the way we see our own identity and name ourselves – carries a weight that either lifts or burdens our souls.

Our name, identity and purpose all come from our connection with the Father. Let your name be one that, when people hear it, brings thoughts of forgiveness and joy and hope; in essence, let your name reflect the One Whose name you carry.



The Name Above All

The Bible is filled with names for Father God and Jesus, as well as Holy Spirit. In fact, books have been written about what the various names mean in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. My research has revealed approximately 366 names for God. They all refer to the same God – the same Lord, the same Savior – but we’ve been given this many names to address, call or describe Him. Even with all the names He’s been given, He cannot be fully described. He is so vast, His expressions so extravagant and His Presence so complete, that He simply can’t be confined to definition.

Proverbs 18:10 talks about the Name of the Lord. It reads: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous run to it and are safe.” Imagine: a name that is a tower!

While visiting Northern Ireland a few years back, my husband and I happened upon a small stone church while driving along the winding country roads. Named Saul Church, it is believed to have been built in the location of a barn where St. Patrick once held services. Alongside the church building stands a stone tower. Not very large by modern standards, it was nonetheless a place of refuge in days gone by. When attacked by enemies, the parishioners knew what to do – run into the tower! A stone tower couldn’t be burnt, and it was built substantially enough that it could not easily be knocked down. Lookouts climbed to the top of the tower to scout out the enemy’s position and strength, and while the men fought the enemy and the lookouts called out strategy, the women and children stayed huddled within the safety of the tower.

I can picture being in a tower; it’s not hard to imagine. As children we hear stories about Rapunzel, Beauty and numerous other heroines in their towers, but to grasp the concept of a *name* being a strong tower takes some imagination – at least until we



realize that the Word isn't talking about using Jesus' name to hide from physical bullets and arrows, but rather about hiding from the schemes and deceptions of the enemy of our souls.

The knowledge that our God is vast and good gives us great hope. No matter how overwhelming our circumstance, how stunning our present difficulty or how deep our pain, we have hope personified within the greatness of His name.

As Nahum 1:7 tells us: "The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble. And He knows those who trust in Him."

Sweeter than Honey

I love Psalm 119:103: "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" When on our lips in worship and gratitude, His very name gives our words a sweetness that makes us sound like Him. When we lick our lips, sweetened with the honey of His name, we remember to speak carefully, clearly and lovingly. Our words have power, even as honey has healing properties, and our words carry the power of life.

Words spoken over us by ourselves or others are of great importance: they carry the power to hurt us or heal us, and they can cause us to doubt or to hope. Just as a king's decree was overturned by making another decree in Bible times, so the pain and sting of harmful, hurtful words is broken by speaking words of blessing and life.

Learning from The Bee

The name Deborah means "bee." The story of Deborah, found in Judges 4 and 5 in the Bible, is a story for our day. Though it is a story of a woman, it is also a story of and for men. (Women have been



long been included in the Biblical term “sons of God,” and men are part of the “bride of Christ.”) As we delve into the life of this woman of God, we will discover that people like Deborah are desperately needed today. Anyone, man or woman, can be a Deborah.

By spending time in the Presence of the Lord, Deborah found a way to gather hope and wisdom to herself, and in a day when women were not educated or permitted to speak publicly, this brave lady listened to her Father and repeated what He said. The opportunity to express His heart presented itself again and again as men and women came to hear her words, and her declarations changed the course of a nation. The most unlikely of candidates, she became the leader of a great and mighty nation, leading a people back to the Father who loved them. Of all people, a *woman* used her voice to bring hope into dark days of terrorism and fear.

Despite great odds, Deborah found her voice and used it to speak the strategy of God to save her nation. She used her voice to effect change, and she put action to her words by being unafraid to do what she was asking of others: she went to battle against terror. I invite you to be like Deborah: find the heart of God for your family, city and nation, use your voice to speak the truth in love, take a stand for justice, and battle against terror with your voice. Deborah was desperately needed in her day: many like her are needed in our day, as well.

Seeds of Hope

I have to wonder: what set Deborah apart from the other women in her town? I understand the call of God, the gifts that He gave and her response to His call, but what amazes me is that Deborah took full advantage of the opportunity presented to her.

Deborah had to decide what she was going to do with what had

been given to her. She had 24 hours in each of her days, just like everyone around her. How in the world did she find time to get alone with God and listen to His heart for the wisdom to address the disputes and interactions of her neighbors? We read that she sat under a palm tree to judge the nation; it's obvious that she sat in the presence of God in order to know what Israel should do. I guess we could say that she listened to God's heart in her prayer closet instead of the gossip at the village well.

Nurturing Hope

Our world is crying out for Deborahs to awake and arise! To take a stand and speak forth the wisdom and hope won by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To see our nations turn toward Him, once again, and be saved from our fear and terror.

We have a great opportunity at our fingertips, if we will but reach out and take it. With God's love in our hearts, His word in our hands and the hope for a great awakening to His presence, we as God's people can stand as gatekeepers at the entrance to our lives, guarding what comes in and what goes out of our families, our cities and our nations. I believe Holy Spirit is just waiting to be welcomed in so that God's Kingdom can grow as a mighty tree among us.

Father God is waiting for us to awaken and arise as Deborah did. He is eager for us to humble ourselves and listen to His heartbeat, to use the voice He's given us to change the earth's atmosphere from one of defeat and despair to one of victory and hope. As we declare His promises rather than the world's problems, we will see Psalm 24:7 become a reality: "Lift up your heads, oh you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory shall come in." He wants to be invited to enter the gates of every life and

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family, every door of every city and nation, and His desire to dwell with us is our greatest hope!

Dear Lord, we, your people, humbly welcome you in.

