

FINDING *God's Presence*  
IN YOUR PAIN

HOPE

When Your

Heart Is

Breaking

RON HUTCHCRAFT

## ENDORSEMENTS

As a popular speaker and longtime radio host, Ron's voice and practical wisdom are known to many. But this is my friend Ron as you've never heard him—with a depth of compassion, honesty, and hope that can only come from a heart that has been broken...and then flooded with hope.

—**Josh D. McDowell**, author

As has been his trademark for decades, Ron attacks the gritty reality of grief in a way that not only reveals his heart but also offers biblical insight and peace to anyone suffering heartache from any source. Ron unflinchingly casts himself into the embrace of the God of all comfort.

—**Jerry B. Jenkins**, novelist and biographer,  
coauthor of the *Left Behind* series

This is a great book, readable, honest, and biblical. A healing balm for those who are suddenly thrust into a bleak future and left only with memories of happier times. Thanks, Ron, for this window into your life that gives us a ray of hope in our sorrow and the reminder that, despite our losses, we still have God and His promises. Read this book for yourself and pass it along to a friend.

—**Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer**, pastor emeritus,  
The Moody Church, Chicago

As followers of Jesus, we have the blessing of knowing that this broken world isn't all there is. Through touching personal stories and his own poignant experiences of brokenness and loss, Ron repeatedly shares the source of our *defiant hope*: Jesus Christ. If you have experienced traumatic loss, I encourage you to read *Hope When Your Heart is Breaking* and cling to the biblical promises Ron offers.

—**Will Graham**, executive director of the Billy  
Graham Training Center at The Cove

When Ron Hutchcraft writes a book, you can be sure it contains both biblical truth and spiritual inspiration. *Hope When Your Heart is Breaking* will lift all our hearts during the difficult seasons of our lives.

—**Jim Cymbala**, pastor, The Brooklyn Tabernacle

I know firsthand the pain of loss when plans change, relationships end, and loved ones die. In *Hope When Your Heart Is Breaking*, my friend Ron Hutchcraft reminds us through Scripture that God is still good. And God is still Hope. This is more than a book—it's a lifeline.

—**Nick Hall**, founder and chief communicator, *Pulse*

We all have a need for hope. But where is hope when the unexpected happens? Our friend Ron writes about his heartbreak with unvarnished honesty—it's real, but so is his needed help, leading us hand in hand to the place of renewed hope. Yes, we all have a need for *this kind of hope!*

—**June Hunt**, founder and chief servant officer, Hope For The Heart and The Hope Center; author

All of us will experience the pain of a broken heart and glimpse the abyss of hopelessness more than once during our life. The wisdom Ron shares in this book reveals practical steps that lead from the valley of the shadow of death to the sun-drenched slopes of hope. I saw my own heartbreak in part two and my own life is brighter because of this book. Yours will be too.

—**Ken Davis**, author, professional speaker, president of Dynamic Communicators

Part of my calling as a pastor is to give hope to hurting people. But hope can be fragile, and holding on to it can be a real struggle. Ron Hutchcraft knows this battle well. Like so many of us, he also has fought to hold on to hope during dark, painful times. That's the reason *Hope When Your Heart Is Breaking* is such a blessing and a treasure. Thank you, Ron, for showing us the way to keep hope alive. What a gift!

—**Dr. Crawford W. Loritts, Jr.**, author, speaker, radio host, and senior pastor, Fellowship Bible Church

There are many takeaways in this book...but the following three are my favorites. They will prove helpful to everyone who embraces them: *I will not deny my pain; I will not be defined by my loss; I will rely on an unseen but certain Hope beyond the hurt.* Thank you, Ron. These are an enormous help.

—**Robert Wolgemuth**, bestselling author

Ron Hutchcraft is a faithful steward of pain. This book is not simply good advice; it's life-tested, rock-solid truth you can rely on. There is no broken part of your life God does not see. Trust Him with your broken pieces. Reading Ron's book will provide hope and light in the darkness.

—**Chris Fabry**, host of *Chris Fabry Live*,  
author of *A Piece of the Moon*

Has there ever been a time when you didn't have the answers to life's deep questions during a great loss in your life? How do you respond in times of uncertainty and overwhelming fear? What do you do when your whole world collapses around you and you feel so alone? Ron so tenderly and genuinely communicates a life lesson learned from the One who created him. Once you pick this book up, you will not want to put it down until you receive all from God's conversation with Ron.

—**Huron Claus**, president, CHIEF Inc.  
(Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship)

Ron's words create poignant, transforming pictures in our minds, drawing us to a higher place. Better than cloud-chasing hope, Scripture's truths can be grasped, lifting us to that place. Not cotton candy—sweet for only a moment—but truths that provide strength through the valley. I've been through that valley myself. I commend Ron's words to you, because they are our Lord's words. Hope guaranteed.

—**Miriam Neff**, founder and president of Widow  
Connection, author, counselor, and speaker

I have had a half-century friendship with the man of God who wrote this greatly needed and relevant book. With suffering out of control in the world today, this message is not optional. If you are in a hurry, start with the last chapter—"The Only Safe Place."

—**George Verwer, DD**, founder of Operation Mobilization

This side of glory, we will have pain, loss, and heartache. But we also have something else—hope. Ron reminds us of God's Word: *Hope* never fails. It's what gets you through the night, past the pain, and into the center of His love. Drink in these pages and be reminded of the priceless constancy of the gift of hope.

—**Janet Parshall**, nationally syndicated talk show host, author

Ron opens up his heart to honestly reveal both the pain and the peace, the grief and the goodness, and the emptiness and the fullness of Christ's presence in the middle of a storm. This book will be transformational to anyone searching for a heartfelt, honest approach to a sudden loss.

—**Joe Battaglia**, broadcaster, author of *Make America Good Again*, president of Renaissance Communications

Most of us don't stop to consider how vital, how essential hope is—until we feel it starting to slip away. Ron Hutchcraft has learned how to fight for hope and where to look when hope is hard to see. He has given all of us a great gift here. This book will breathe fresh hope into even the most discouraged heart.

—**Bob Lepine**, cohost, *FamilyLife Today*

Every time I hear or read Ron Hutchcraft, I know Jesus is at the center of the message. He is always pointing us to Jesus. This book is another great example of this. You'll be inspired to anchor your faith in Jesus through every storm.

—**Ted Cunningham**, pastor, Woodland Hills Family Church, author of *Fun Loving You*

I think the integrity of Ron Hutchcraft and the timeliness of this book is no coincidence. If there's one thing we need right now, it's hope. Thank you for leading us to the only one who can give us hope, Jesus.

—**Grant Skeldon**, Next Gen director for Q, author of *The Passion Generation*

Ron Hutchcraft acknowledges the hardship of pain and suffering while also encouraging that despair does not have to be the end of the story. Because of the gospel, we do not have to succumb to despair, but we have the authority in Jesus to walk in hope that cannot be shaken.

—**Emma Mae Jenkins**, author of *Be Loved* and *All Caps YOU*, Gen Z social media influencer/speaker

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**RON HUTCHCRAFT**



**HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS**  
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*To the life and memory of my Karen,  
the love of my life.*



I am forever grateful for her enduring love. Her undying loyalty. Her life-changing wisdom. Her belief in me, when I deserved it and when I didn't. Her uncompromised honesty. Her delightful unpredictability. Her profound walk with God. And her incomparable laugh. She was so much more than my "better half." She made my half so much better than it ever could have been without her. Only heaven will show how much of what I have done and what I have become is because God gave me Karen.

My "beyond words" gratitude goes to our three children—Lisa, Doug and Brad—and to Rick, Anna, and Sara, the amazing people they married; and to my selfless sister-in-law, Valerie. Their love and support and encouragement have been the difference over and over again.





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FOREWORD

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

*by Joni Eareckson Tada*

**Y**ou've been through it. A whirlwind of devastations that rip through your sanity or a haunting depression that lingers like a low-grade fever. Or it could be the insistent nagging of chronic pain. It happened to me the other night. As a quadriplegic, my husband, Ken, must position me on my side with pillows so I can sleep. Sensing pain on the rise and knowing I would not be able to adjust myself, my breathing got shorter. "Pray that I won't lose hope," I whispered to Ken.

I am always amazed at how often our hope is put to the test. A festering sore, a pinched nerve, the slow ticking of the clock, or the terror of feeling all alone in your struggle. Like me when paralysis and pain nearly overwhelm me. It drains almost all hope out of my heart.

*Almost.*

That's the story of Ron Hutchcraft. When I first read the book you hold in your hands, I was stunned. I've never seen Ron without a

winsome, confident smile and a bounce in his step. His faith is strong, his calling is clear, and I don't think the man ever misses an opportunity to tell others about Jesus. Ron is the picture of assurance, strength, and resolve. But then the untimely death of his beloved life-partner almost took him out of the battle. *Almost.*

It is why I found *Hope When Your Heart Is Breaking* to be such a blessing. Ron invites the reader into the innermost chamber in his heart, a place not many strong men even speak of, let alone reveal. It's a broken place, and when he describes his pain, you feel as though he is limping on shards of glass.

But it is what makes this book believable. Authentic. Convincing. So when this seasoned student of God's Word invites you to take the same path that led him up and out of emptiness, you listen. You follow his directives. You trust his guidance through the hope-filled pages of Scripture.

*Hope When Your Heart Is Breaking* is your husky, bravehearted guide through dark valleys into the fresh air of biblical hope. Its pages may be splattered with pain, but you will find on them eternal principles that will be a light for your path. Do not fear if your world is almost splitting apart at the seams. Just take your favorite coffee to your easy chair, get started reading, and let Ron bring you back from the edge of *almost.*

*Joni Eareckson Tada*

Joni and Friends International  
Disability Center, 2020



## INTRODUCTION

# HOPE AS REAL AS THE HURT

**I**t was, as the saying goes, “a dark and stormy night.”

We had just finished an event on a Native American reservation, led by a team of inspiring Native young people. All night those storm clouds had hovered around the basketball court but mercifully held off during the event.

Once we were safely in the church basement where we were staying, those angry skies blew their top. After a lightning strike that sounded as though it was moving in, we were suddenly plunged into pitch-black darkness. The only thing worse than the lightning was the girls’ screaming.

We couldn’t see anybody or anything, and with a nasty storm sounding off outside—well, it was creepy. Eerily quiet for a basement full of young people.

After a few nervous minutes in the dark, someone found a candle.

“Anybody got a match?” Yup. One precious candle and one priceless match. I cannot begin to tell you the change in that room when that little flame flickered to life.

It wasn't much. Just a little light. But it changed everything.

In our personal dark times—and we all have them—that little flame has a name. It's called hope. And it changes everything.

But that flame can be fragile too. It can be extinguished all too easily—and leave us alone and afraid in the dark again.

Hope has been taking a beating in our generation. The late United States senator John McCain said, not long before his passing: “The world is in greater turmoil than at any other time in my lifetime.”

The future we might have been confident of not so long ago now is looking increasingly uncertain. You can feel the unease. The anxiety. Even anger.

As we absorb each day's breaking news, it seems as if there's a tsunami of mega-problems that overwhelms our answers. Our headlines are dominated by the unpredictable. The unthinkable. Our politics are chaotic and toxic, the financial world is vulnerable, and our safe places aren't safe anymore.

It's increasingly disturbing to contemplate the kind of world our children and grandchildren will have to navigate without a map. One friend summed it up pretty well: “It just seems like nothing is working.”

Again and again, we're hit with how quickly the flame of hope can go out. A storm...a quake...a pandemic...an accident...a breakup...a job loss...a financial disaster...bad news from the doctor. Life's unexpected losses keep reminding us how insecure our security is. How not in control we really are. How quickly our “go to” person or thing can be gone.

It turns out, hope is more fragile than we knew. People and anchors who secure our lives are more “losable” than we realized.

I know. One night the amazing woman I had loved since I was 19

was by my side at our grandson's graduation. The next afternoon, she was gone.

Whenever I would come home from work or a trip, I'd head for our great room and immediately look over at Karen's blue recliner. I could see her beautiful gray hair—her “crown of glory”—as I came through the door. I would know my baby was there and the world was okay.

But that day, the blue chair was empty. And I would never see her crown of glory there again.

The loss was incalculable. It touched every part of my life and my future. Suddenly my personal world was turned upside down. The light had gone out.

Oh, how I needed hope. And, oh, what I have learned about what hope is and what it isn't. By the nature of my people-helping life's work, I've walked with many through their dark valleys—jobs, marriage, divorce, children, faith, failure, heartbreak—and yes, grief. And I've learned about hope what only real life can teach.

Grief isn't just about losing a person you love. That's certainly the big one, but definitely not the only one. Loss comes in many forms. Losing your marriage. Losing your dream. Losing your health. Losing your job...your income...your retirement. Losing a child emotionally or spiritually. Losing a treasured relationship or the future you had planned. Or the quiet grieving of what was lost—or taken from you—in the past.

Wherever there's loss, there's grieving. And wherever there's grieving, there are choices. Some lead to hope and healing. Some lead to more hurt and more grief.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, two characters are discussing the looming invasion by sinister forces that threatens their lives in Middle-earth.

I was struck by how aptly it describes our human experience when a dark season of loss upends our life.



“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

Indeed, we have no choice about the loss we are grieving. I had no choice about my Karen’s passing. But my future would not be decided primarily by her death, but by what I did with that heartrending loss.

So if you were to ask me what this book is about, and I had to do it in four words, I’d say loss...grief...choices...hope. Not “hope” the concept. But “hope” the experience. Hope the choice.

For hope to overcome despair in life’s dark valleys, it has to be something more than the syrupy, unanchored variety usually offered to us. More than the Wikipedia definition of hope as “an optimistic attitude of mind based on expectation of positive outcomes.”

The hope needs to be as real as the hurt. As strong as the grief. As compelling as the fear. As powerful as the pull to give up.

So what’s in these pages is not philosophical. It’s deeply, deeply personal. Down-to-earth practical. And real.

I’ve seen hope that failed to deliver, like a light that goes out when you’re in the dark. But I’ve also seen the kind of hope that keeps lighting up the darkness.

*Defiant hope.*

Hope that finds the healing presence of God Himself in the midst of the rubble. A hope that shakes its fist at despair and fear and shouts, “No! You can’t have me!”

That’s worth writing about. And, I hope, worth reading about.



PART ONE

**THE FLAG OVER  
THE RUBBLE**





CHAPTER 1

## EMOTIONAL OXYGEN

*But I know somehow that only when it is  
dark enough can you see the stars.*

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING

Code Blue.”

The announcement that summons all available medical personnel to a life-or-death emergency. Except this day it was the person I loved more than anyone in the world.

My wife’s procedure that day was really just a test. A heart catheterization to check her arteries. I was passing the waiting room time tackling a couple of items on my to-do list.

Then that announcement. “Code Blue.” Never occurred to me that it could be my Karen.

It was. I knew as soon as the waiting room door opened and I saw the look on the doctor’s face. Later, I would learn that her lungs had suddenly been overwhelmed with seven and a half liters of fluid. She was drowning, and no one knew. Until the doctor said, “I don’t like how her color has changed.”

My mind went into overdrive, flooded with what this could mean. Had I held the love of my life for the last time? I've done my whole life with her. How can I do the rest of it without her?

I was gasping for emotional oxygen. I was desperate for hope.

## GASPING FOR AIR

In medical terms, they “bagged” my wife that Code Blue day—using a respirator bag to push life-saving oxygen into her lungs. To save her from literally drowning right in front of them.

Drowning is a pretty fair description of how it feels emotionally when one of life's sledgehammers hits. In those moments that seem to knock the breath out of us.

The death of a marriage. The diagnosis that could mean either a death sentence or a life sentence of pain. The life-scarring choice made by your prodigal son or daughter. The caregiving that is pushing you to the limit. The “your mother and I are getting a divorce” that shatters your security.

The crisis of hope can come from the painful past that pursues you wherever you go. The “we don't need you anymore” from the company you've given so much to. The verdict that you won't be able to have children. The devastating failure.

For most of us, there has been—or there will be—that crushing time when we are desperate for a life preserver. We are drowning.

Like the day when Laura learned her husband was suddenly arrested for sexual crimes with underage girls. Or the day Greg and Tammy were informed that their five-year-old daughter had terminal leukemia. Or when the one man Beth had learned to trust—her mother's boyfriend—sexually assaulted her.

Or that awful day when the love of my life was gone in one

life-shattering moment. God had graciously given her back to me ten years ago after her Code Blue crisis. But now, the woman I adored, the only person I've done every day of my adult life with, was suddenly gone.

Most of us know the feeling on some level. A loss that levels us. A storm that obscures the sun we've always navigated by. A blow that leaves us feeling lost on a road with no map.

Gasping for air. Grasping for a life preserver.

## WIMPY HOPE

Hope really is the emotional oxygen that keeps us going. "Things will get better." "It doesn't have to be the way it's always been." "Something good is about to happen."

The dictionary variously defines *hope* as "a feeling of expectation" or "a desire for certain things to happen." Or "grounds for believing something good may happen" and "intending, if possible, to do something."

Nice. But not enough. Not for the 7.5 lifequakes. The Category 5 storms. We need more than a "feeling," a "desire," or "an optimistic attitude." The blows are heavy. A lot of "hope" is Hope Lite. Too wimpy to bring us back when we can barely breathe. And no match for the moments that seem to shatter hope.

Hope has to be more than "when you wish upon a star." Or crossing your fingers. Or just quoting inspiring slogans from a motivational speaker.

We need something more muscular, more durable, more authentic.

There is hope like that. I know. It's the air I'm breathing right now. That's sustaining each of the shell-shocked people I mentioned earlier.

But it doesn't come from your circumstances. It comes from your choices.

## THE FLAG IN THE RUBBLE

“You should turn on the TV. An airplane just crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers.”

A family member called to alert me. Who could have possibly known the unspeakable tragedy we were about to see unfold that fateful September day?

We’d been to the top of the World Trade Center many times. I knew someone who worked in an office there. To see those seemingly indestructible towers crumble to dust before our eyes—there are no words for it.

News anchors usually report the news dispassionately. Not on September 11, 2001. Like most of us, they could not conceal their disbelief and grief.

Suddenly, we were feeling something Americans were not used to feeling. Vulnerable. Our hallowed space between two protecting oceans had been brutally invaded. And we would never feel the same kind of safe again.

For a few hours, there were some hopes that a massive rescue effort could still save many lives. Those hopes were short-lived. An evacuation order was issued to all firefighters searching in the rubble. By late that afternoon, hope was hard to find.

And then, the flag.

Three weary firefighters. The dusty flag they had recovered from a boat in the harbor. They couldn’t possibly have known what the simple act of raising that flag over that heartbreaking pile of rubble would mean.

It remains the most iconic image of a generation’s darkest day.

Or, as *USA Today* said in their next edition, “It was hope on a day when it seemed that all hope was gone.”

It flew above the wreckage of a heart-shattering day. And seemed to

say against a backdrop that appeared to represent only despair: “It isn’t over, folks. There’s hope.”

Yes.

*Defiant hope!*

## THE COUNTERPUNCH

Truck drivers see it all the time. I’ve seen it a few times when we’ve needed to drive through the night.

It comes about the time you’ve opened the window on a frigid night. And you’ve turned to the most annoying radio station you can find. Because the night is getting long, and your eyelids are staying a little too long in the down position. To top it off, it seems like the dark has gotten darker as morning approaches.

Suddenly, there it is. A dim but distinct glow in the eastern sky. Oh, it’s still really dark, for the most part. But the glow will grow. And as it brightens, so does the horizon. Still dark, but something’s happening out there.

And you know the long night isn’t going to be forever. There’s light on the edges. And the light is pushing aside a wider and higher swath of that numbing darkness.

Ultimately, there’s that glorious moment when, preceded by glowing clouds, the sun teases the horizon. And in minutes, the darkness has lost. The sun has won. And the first light that had only brightened the horizon soon illuminates the whole landscape.

That’s my picture of hope. That’s why, on many mornings, I stand at the window, watching the sunrise.

Every sunset in my lifetime has been followed by a sunrise. Without fail.

By virtue of the people-helping work I do, I’ve walked with many



through their darkest nights. And beginning the day I lost my wife—my baby—I believe I have been walking through mine.

And I'm ready to venture a real-life definition of *hope*. Of *defiant hope*:

*Hope is a buoyant confidence, acknowledging the hurt,  
but anchored in an unseen but certain reality.*

No, not wishful thinking. No, not inspirational slogans. Not escapist denial.

But a confidence that squarely faces the loss and the unanswered questions, yet chooses to not be defined by them.

Rather, to trust life's Grand Weaver to make something meaningful—even beautiful—out of these dark threads.

Hope requires choices that defy the seeming hopelessness you may feel. In the pages ahead, we will explore five of life's hope robbers, along with the choices that offer short-term relief—but long term, only more pain. More importantly, we will discover the choices that will help us breathe the life-restoring oxygen of hope.

Choices that don't deny but do defy the pain of your past. The grief in your heart. The wilderness that surrounds you. The danger in our world. The seemingly unfixable brokenness of your marriage. The bitterness that seethes in your soul. The failure that has made you not want to get up. The sad story that has been much of your life. The person or situation that seems like it will never change.

There is a way to make it through the darkest night. There is a way to raise a flag of hope over the rubble.

It's called *defiant hope*!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Ron Hutchcraft** is a veteran ministry leader and speaker, and founder and president of Ron Hutchcraft Ministries and On Eagle's Wings Native American youth outreach. He is the author of *A Life That Matters*, *Peaceful Living in a Stressful World*, *The Battle for a Generation*, and more. His popular radio feature, *A Word with You*, is heard daily on over 1,300 outlets and in the world's five most-spoken languages. Ron and his late wife Karen have three children and nine grandchildren.

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