

Every Reason to Praise

Healing,
Wisdom, and
Strength
for Your Life

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BroadStreet
PUBLISHING

BroadStreet Publishing Group, LLC
Racine, Wisconsin, USA
BroadStreetPublishing.com

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ISBN-13: 978-1-4245-5384-6 (softcover)

ISBN-13: 978-1-4245-5385-3 (e-book)

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Cover design by Chris Garborg at garborgdesign.com

Typesetting by Katherine Lloyd at theDESKonline.com

Printed in the United States of America

17 18 19 20 5 4 3 2 1



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During my childhood, I experienced a number of traumatic events, some of which were life threatening. All were life changing. From an early age, I was taught that God loved the world. I thought that meant He was focused on global issues that impacted the masses. My experiences revealed that God isn't just an entity I will meet after death. He is love and ever present, always available to us personally. Amid the chaos around me, God's peace and presence helped me face my circumstances.

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While my cousin was using a broom handle to remove a toy that became stuck in a light fixture, the fixture's glass shattered and rained down onto my face. At the hospital, the doctors were amazed that the glass hadn't fallen into my eyes and I didn't need plastic surgery. Even before I knew how to ask for God's help, His grace saved me from tragedy.

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Painful moments are easier to bear when God is trusted. With God's love, life moves on. Embracing forgiveness in trauma

allows healing to begin. Only by God's grace can we forgive, and forgiveness results in the ability to love, trust, and enjoy life again. While it is easier to stay angry, forgiveness and God's grace expedite the healing process. Anger is a normal emotion, but how we recover from hurt determines our growth and future.

Chapter 4: Love that Has Been There All Along 53

There are many obstacles to divine appointments—life-changing moments to give and receive love. God cares about even the smallest fish in the ocean, and he has even more love for us. He's been in charge throughout our entire life.

Chapter 5: God in Our Storms 67

Praise and prayer in the midst of chaos removes panic and prepares us to walk in peace through present and future storms. God's insight and strength allows us to overcome our trials and then be an encouragement to others as they hear the testimony of God's faithfulness.

Chapter 6: God Mends the Pieces 87

While I was out jogging one morning, a hairline fracture resulted in one of my ankle bones being crushed. Doctors insisted that I have reconstructive surgery, and I experienced unexplainable excruciating pain because my nerves hadn't healed properly after radiation therapy ten years before. I walked through this storm, not knowing the root of the pain, and as a result considered people who deal with intense pain daily. I wore a cast and a boot for about a year as my ankle healed, which resulted in God teaching me to slow down, reflect, and realize what He wanted to change and heal in my chaotic life.

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We often pursue a personal dream only to have God surprise us with a greater purpose that we never expected. We need to be willing to be used for God's glory and to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. An unexpected calling from God may manifest itself at any time, and we must embrace God's purpose when it's revealed.

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The first time I heard the word *intercessor*, I had no idea what it meant. What I now know is that every emotion is a cause for prayer. When I'm excited, I offer a prayer of gratitude; when I'm concerned, I lift a prayer for peace; and when I'm sad, I pray for the joy of the Lord.

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When the Holy Spirit puts something on our heart, we don't know how much time we have to capitalize on that opportunity. We mustn't take time for granted. I'm not sure how much time I have left, but my ability to speak has been threatened on five occasions. That's enough reason to use my voice boldly for the kingdom and to maximize each moment I have breath.

Chapter 10: **An Excuse to Eat French Fries** 127

My cancer and radiation treatment slowed my metabolism and I gained weight. I now have to be careful what foods I eat, and everything is an excuse to eat french fries. I tried to deal with weight issues—I'd do well for a while but then stop eating healthily. When I fasted and asked God how to handle this issue, He showed me I was eating someone else's portion. I

realized that with difficult issues to overcome, we must let the Holy Spirit work with us; if not, we stand in the way of our own progress. I now understand that my body is God's temple and should be treated accordingly.

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Introduction

We have every reason to praise God. Giving Him glory is the one thing that provides constant joy. God is sovereign. Even during the most difficult circumstances, we can persevere—and grow in faith—as we praise Him in the roughest storm or lowest valley.

If anyone has reason to praise, it's me. I've walked through dark valleys all throughout my life. Even so, incredible blessings and remarkable experiences, both personally and professionally, have encouraged me.

Personally, I was born with a clubbed foot, and for the first three years of my life, I wore a cast on my leg to correct it. I've also survived life-threatening medical conditions, serious injuries, chronic ailments, major surgeries, and cancer. I praise God for His peace and faithfulness throughout the extensive times of difficulty in my life.

Professionally, I've worked for many of the most prominent names in journalism—Roone Arledge, Leslie Moonves, David Brinkley, Cokie Roberts, Sam Donaldson, Diane Sawyer, Charles Gibson, Peter Jennings, David Remnick,

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Katie Couric, Charlie Rose, Gayle King, and many others. I've worked for three of the four broadcast television networks and within numerous industries, including news, entertainment, publishing, and film. I've also served as the head of communications for preeminent mainstream and African American magazines. I've traveled extensively and experienced various cultures.

Along the way, I've learned that the remedy during our darkest, loneliest, and most challenging moments is praise. In fact, giving God praise and worship while deep in the valleys of life will help us through the most painful, debilitating circumstances and allow us to recover in ways we never imagined.

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that merriment has the ability to relieve great misery, but praise defies logic and has immense impact. At times, God calls us to bypass our reasoning and trust Him. An act of praise led Moses to take the Israelites to the edge of the Red Sea and cross it on dry land, and an act of praise inspired David to face and slay Goliath with a simple sling and stones. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

In the ultimate act of praise (and love), Jesus lived, died, and resurrected on our behalf. Many people accept

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only what they can see as truth. But some things are true whether we see them—or believe them—or not. The Bible says “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). I pray that you will be able to discern what only spiritual eyes can see as you read this book.

At the end of each chapter you will find a few extras to help you reflect on the story I’ve shared. “Out of the Valley” provides a summary and key takeaways from the story. I suggest a few points of action in “Into the Light.” There is a “Prayer” to help you start a conversation with God, along with “Scriptures” and “Songs” for additional inspiration.

I’m always encouraged by stories of God’s grace, and writing about my own experiences with it has reminded me how much I’m loved and blessed by God. I pray that this book will bless you and confirm for you just how much God loves you too.



Let everything that has breath
praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD!
(Psalm 150:6)



I watched through the small round window of my hospital room door as the doctor discussed my health status with my parents. Unbeknownst to them, the door was slightly ajar, which allowed me to hear their conversation. My father rubbed my mother's back when she began to cry. The doctor had informed them that, at only thirteen years old, I had only days left to live and they should contact any family members who would want to come say goodbye to me.

I'd been admitted to the hospital after several days with an extremely high temperature, chills, and dizziness, as well as the inability to keep down any food for nearly a week prior to the symptoms' start. The doctors treated me

for everything that seemed probable—from the flu to leukemia to sickle cell anemia. Nothing had worked, and they were prepared to give up. They allowed a cot to be brought into my room so my mother could sleep next to me for the precious few nights I had left.

While I'd only been hospitalized for a short time, each day had been grueling. My body temperature hovered around 104 degrees, and my IV pole accompanied me everywhere I went. The sweat-drenched sheets on my bed were changed several times a day and throughout the night, and my nose often bled so heavily that the duty nurse had to cauterize it, which was terribly painful. The only food or drink I could keep down were cherries and Pepsi—no kidding.

As the doctors suggested, my mother contacted relatives, many of whom came from near and far to visit. I loved it. Seeing everyone was wonderful—and a welcome distraction. We laughed at each other's jokes and relived family antics, and then they would leave the room and break down in tears. Even so, I remained focused on all the happy memories despite the reality of my circumstances.

But as the days passed, the steady stream of relatives dwindled and I found myself alone more and more. In the quiet moments, I reflected on my past, and as I did, I realized just how much I wanted to see the future; I wanted to live. I hadn't given that much thought while the room was

filled with people and joyful conversations, but with them gone, the gravity of what I faced hit me hard.

The quiet reflection also made me aware that the moments of happiness had been orchestrated for my benefit. That compelled me to thank God for providing joy during this difficult time. I also asked Him to allow me to devote whatever time I had left to encouraging others, whether they were sick or well, so they might experience the kind of comfort I felt when my room was filled with family and friends. I didn't know how that would play out, but the thought of helping others made me feel much better.

Finally, after days of struggling to eat, feeling weak, and watching the walls of my hospital room while constantly being pricked and prodded, moments of melancholy came. On one of those occasions, I decided to escape the confinement of my room. An IV gave me constant fluids, but fortunately its pole had wheels. Holding onto the pole, I slowly placed one slipper in front of the other and made my way into the hallway. The nurses, pleased by my desire to venture out, cheered me on. Even so, I could only make it about ten feet from my room due to my greatly weakened state.

As I shuffled my feet to make the U-turn, I waved to the patients I encountered along my short journey. They looked surprised to see me, probably because I was the only child in the ward; most children were treated at the children's

hospital across the street. I would have been treated there as well, but no beds were available at the time of my arrival. Nevertheless, they welcomed my greetings, and the smiles I received in return lifted my spirits. My maiden voyage was a great success—exhausting yet exhilarating.

The next time I needed a change in mood, I ventured all the way to the maternity ward. It was quite a trek but truly worth the effort. Observing the newborns brought me extraordinary comfort. They emanated life, beauty, and innocence. As I peered through the glass, all I could think about was how precious they were. I prayed for a life of love, support, and protection for each one.

I determined then that if I could love a little baby I'd never met and had only seen through glass, surely God loved me and cared about my situation. I also realized that the more time I spent visiting the maternity ward and other patients, the less attention I gave my own circumstances. I began to appreciate how helping others is far more gratifying than remaining self-focused.

Soon, my doctors decided to make one last effort to save my life. A specialist was brought in to retrieve my bone marrow for testing. The procedure involved a deep cut into my thigh, an excruciatingly painful process. For the very first time since my medical mystery started, emotion overwhelmed me and I started to cry. As the tears fell,

I recalled the only other time I had ever felt such unbearable pain.

I was seven years old. On a sweltering hot summer day, my brothers and I were inside, where it was almost just as hot as it was outside. I am the youngest child and the only girl in the family. With four biological brothers and one male cousin who spent so much time with us that he was considered a brother, I had grown into a tomboy. On this particular afternoon, I was playing “horsey” with my brothers David and Dexter, who were six and three years older than I. David carried us on his back as he crawled around the floor on his hands and knees.

Dexter and I took turns riding, and it was great fun. I noticed how David would raise his hands in the air to imitate a rearing horse while Dexter was on his back, and asked him to do the same with me.

“I’m sorry, Baby Girl,” David said. “I don’t think you’re strong enough to hold on.”

Indignant, I insisted, “I can hold on!”

He shook his head. “Not yet. I’ll take you on that type of ride when you’re older.”

How unfair. The mere injustice was cause for debate. I pleaded with him and promised I could handle it. Finally, David agreed. Whee! Up we went and down we came. I loved it! Whee! Again, up we went and down we came.

“One more time!” I begged. “Please! Please! Just once more. Please!”

So up we went, and as he started the descent, I lost my grip on his neck. Falling backward, I hit my head on a fan on the floor that was set to the highest speed. It was an extremely old fan that lacked a protective cover, which allowed my head to go directly into the blades. Blood gushed everywhere, and a flurry of activity surrounded me. My father hurried into the room, picked me up, and pressed a towel to the crown of my head to hold my scalp together. He quickly determined there wasn’t enough time to wait for an ambulance and sent my brother next door to ask our neighbor to meet him at our car.

Our neighbor drove to the hospital as Dad held my head together and assured me that everything would be fine. Although the circumstances appeared otherwise, I felt comforted. At the emergency room, I was taken directly into surgery. The surgeon told us he couldn’t wait for the anesthesiologist to arrive so he’d have to stitch my wound without anesthesia. He went on to say that he would be quick, but it would hurt a lot.

What an understatement! The pain was excruciating. I felt each entry and exit of the needle. Even the movement of the thread caused pain. Finally, the stitching was over. Throughout the entire ordeal, God had provided peace and

calmness. That had been one of my first memories of feeling His presence.

Now at age thirteen, I endured terrible pain again as the doctor extracted marrow from my bone. The test results revealed a treatable condition, and an intense regimen of drugs followed. By the grace of God, my body responded to the new treatment and I was on the road to recovery.

Through it all, the experience of my grave illness presented me with an awareness of God's presence and peace. I also gained a new level of understanding that has served me immeasurably throughout my life. Praying and praising in the dark valleys of life is just as rewarding as the opportunities that those circumstances provide. God blessed me with far more time than I ever expected and allowed me to grow spiritually all through the journey.



Out of the Valley

God is sovereign, and with Him we are not victims. It's a privilege to serve and assist in the furthering of His kingdom through our experiences. While in the valley, if we focus on selflessness, we forget our innate selfishness.

For example, when I was hospitalized, spending time in the maternity ward was one source of encouragement for me. During my convalescence, I would wander over to watch the newborns. Praying over them and holding the ones who had no family was a true blessing. I also found joy in spending time with and reading to other patients who had no one to visit them.

Add joy to your life by serving others in whatever way is available to you in your circumstances. When you're in the valley, praise; when you get tired, pray; and when you get tired of praying, praise some more. You'll be surprised by how much better you feel.

Into the Light

- * Remember you're not a victim. The enemy wants you to think you are, but the battle has already been waged and won. It is finished. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have the victory. It's up to us to receive His grace,

activate our faith, and walk victoriously, knowing that the trials are temporary.

- * Volunteer to help someone else. There are always people in need, and many are in greater need than we are. Explore ways to contribute to the betterment of others. When your attention is focused elsewhere, it changes your perspective and enables you to view the circumstances through a broader lens.
- * Praise, and when you get tired, pray. When you get tired of praying, praise some more. Repeat.

Prayer

Holy Father, I thank you for your divine presence in my life. I praise you for seeing me through the valleys, and humbly ask you to open my heart and allow me to rejoice in you every day, regardless of the circumstances I face. Please help me to not just go through my experiences, but also grow through them, walking in the peace that only you can provide. I thank you for where you have me now and for the journey ahead, for I know you will not forsake me. I am eternally grateful for your grace and for the many times you've covered me with it, even before I was aware of your sacrifice. May I be a blessing to the people in my life and those I encounter, and may your Holy Spirit fill me to overflowing so that I can share with others the love and compassion that comes from you. Amen.

Scriptures

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst.” Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:28–30)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Songs

“How Great Thou Art” by Carl Boberg and Stuart Hine
“This Is My Story” by Fanny Crosby
“Every Praise” by Hezekiah Walker



About the Author

Sonya McNair is an accomplished executive corporate and media strategist who counsels Fortune 500 companies, non-profit organizations, corporate executives, and high-profile clients on the implementation and sustaining of strategic initiatives, operations, and media affairs. She develops business strategies, manages crisis communications, and directs media outreach.

Most recently, Sonya worked for CBS News in the capacity of senior vice president of Communications where she advised the chairman and its president on strategic communications and oversaw media and talent relations, as well as public affairs, for the entire news division, including CBS News broadcasts and platforms.

Previously, Sonya was spokesperson and director of Public Relations for *The New Yorker*, where she directed press affairs and strategies for the magazine and *The New Yorker* Festival. Prior to that, she was vice president of Corporate

Communications for Time Inc.'s Essence Communications and was responsible for *ESSENCE* magazine, ESSENCE Books, and The Essence Music Festival. She also designed the launch strategy for Time Inc.'s fashion forward magazine, *Suede*.

Formerly, Sonya McNair held the position of vice president of Publicity and Corporate Communications for the Fox Broadcasting Company, where she oversaw East Coast media relations for the network, counseled the president of Sales, and served as a key liaison across all Newscorp business units. She also managed publicity campaigns for the successful launch of hit shows, such as *American Idol* and *24*. She worked closely with major advertisers to communicate core positioning and marketing campaigns, directed special events, including Upfront presentations and press conferences, and served as a key liaison for the network across Newscorp's business units.

McNair spent sixteen years at ABC News and held several increasingly responsible positions at the network, including director of Media Relations and spokesperson for the network's news division.

Sonya lives in New York with her husband, Deryck.