

JONI EARECKSON TADA

Foreword by Keith & Kristyn Getty



SONGS *of* SUFFERING

25 Hymns and Devotions for Weary Souls

“No one in the evangelical world has done more reading, thinking, praying, and reflecting on suffering and faith than Joni Eareckson Tada. She is always ‘must-reading,’ but this particular book is a brilliant addition to her body of work. Music sends theology deep into the heart in a unique way, and Joni’s meditations on these beautiful hymns will make them even more effective in your life. Highly recommended.”

TIM KELLER, Pastor Emeritus, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City

“Scripture tells us to be Spirit-filled, ‘addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.’ Joni is the only person I know who actually lives this out, and she does it despite suffering more than anyone else I know. God has given Joni to the church as a gift and beautiful example of sacrificial worship. I’m so grateful that she has authored this book!”

FRANCIS CHAN, Crazy Love Ministries; Pastor; author, *Crazy Love* and *Letters to the Church*

“Once again Joni has found a way to redeem her suffering and to do so in a way that inspires and encourages others. A gorgeous book with a deep message.”

PHILIP YANCEY, author, *Where the Light Fell* and *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*

“My friend Joni lives with pain in her body, a tune in her heart, and a song on her tongue. Her faithful ministry to us all comes through the songs she sings, the great example of what Ephesians 5:19 was meant to look like in us all. I aspire to become what I see in my sister. In her prolonged suffering, she worships her loving Father to proclaim his greatness to a watching world. Joni is a miracle, a spectacle of grace. Who better to lead us through our most precious hymns for the hardest seasons of life?”

TONY REINKE, Senior Teacher; Host, *Ask Pastor John*, *Desiring God*

“Joni is a pillar of hope to our generation. I’m grateful for her wisdom and for her voice that cuts through the complacency and calls us to hope. This devotional collection is one you’ll reach for when you’re weary.”

SANDRA MCCRACKEN, singer-songwriter; hymn writer; recording artist; columnist, *Christianity Today*; author, *Send Out Your Light*

“Songs of Suffering is one of those rare books that isn’t intended to be read; it’s intended to be experienced. I sang, cried, smiled, prayed, and worshiped through every page. No matter what you’re walking through, let Joni be your song leader, and your heart won’t be the same.”

DAVID PLATT, Pastor-Teacher, McLean Bible Church; author, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

“Where would we be without hymns? Where would we be without songs to express our sorest griefs and deepest sorrows? I hope you’ll allow Joni Eareckson Tada to introduce you to some of the best and most powerful of them all, to explain how they have been a blessing and comfort to her—and to encourage you to get to know them, to commit them to memory, and to sing them before the Lord, so they can be a blessing and comfort to you as well.”

TIM CHALLIES, author, *Seasons of Sorrow*

“If you take the time to open up this book, be warned: it will grow your faith. It will help you fall in love with Christ more, as you learn to sing hymns that will sustain you and uphold you through days of misery and suffering. I was greatly encouraged by Joni’s Songs of Suffering, and you will be too.”

DEEPAK REJU, Pastor of Biblical Counseling and Family Ministry, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC

“Joni’s gorgeous writing, as poetic as the hymns she champions and cherishes, helped me stare into the time-honored texts, many of which I’ve sung all my life, and discover depths and beauties I’d not seen before. Reading this book was truly illuminating and inspiring to my heart.”

FERNANDO ORTEGA, hymn writer; recording artist; worship leader

“Joni has given us a gift: to learn to sing through our sorrows and all the days of our lives. Through historical hymns and biblical reflections, we are reminded to go to our Savior, who cares for us more deeply than we could ever imagine. Join Joni and the choir of those who have gone before us to sing of the excellencies of our God. Your heart will be glad as your tongue rejoices (Ps. 16:9).”

TRILLIA NEWBELL, author, *A Great Cloud of Witnesses; If God Is For Us; and Sacred Endurance*



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25 Hymns and Devotions for Weary Souls

Joni Eareckson Tada

Foreword by Keith and Kristyn Getty

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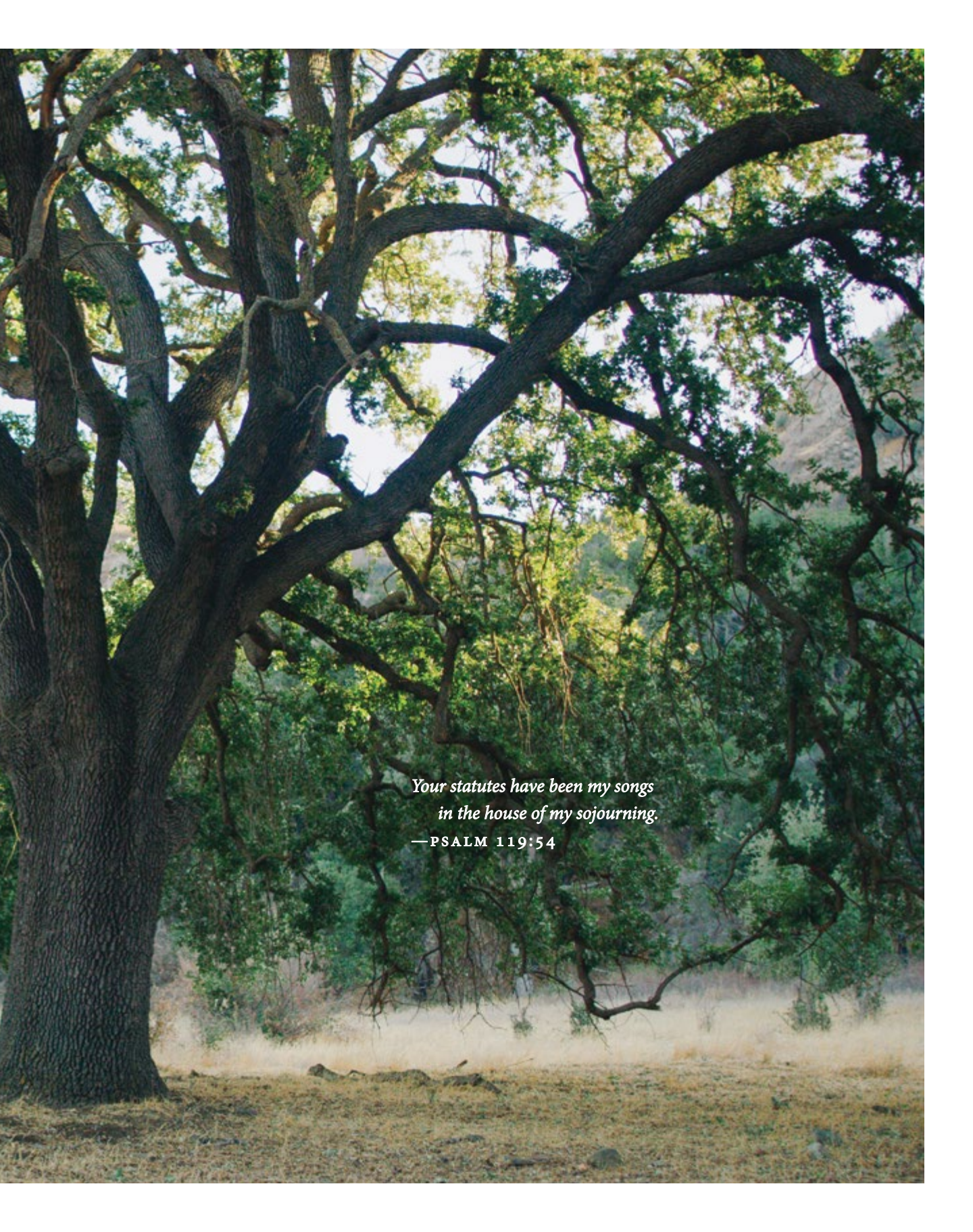
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For Rika Theron

The night of this little dark world is already quickly passing away. The dawn of eternity will soon appear, and then the King's own voice will speak. And every "prisoner of hope"—the afflicted and the struggling ones—will stand forth—emancipated and unhurt—the brighter, the gladder, and the more beloved for all the sufferings through which they passed. And there, they will magnify God's holy name for the salvation He wrought. And as each faithful spirit goes up to its eternal rest, and his foes are at His feet for ever—this will be all his history, and all his boast—"He believed in his God."¹

This will be all your history, Rika, and all your boast—
"She believed in her God."





*Your statutes have been my songs
in the house of my sojourning.*

—PSALM 119:54



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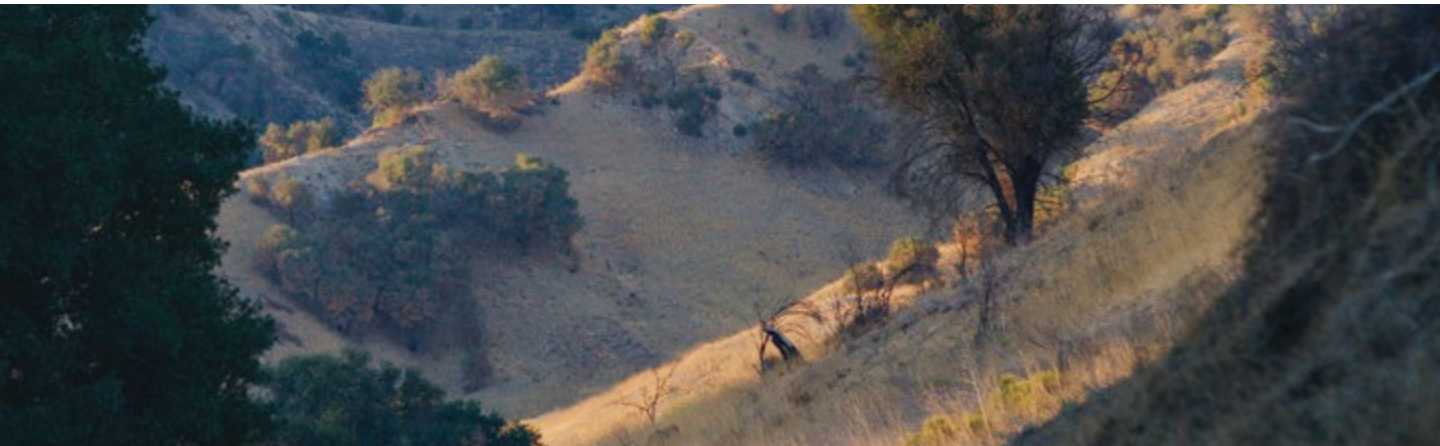
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Foreword

Personal Reflections from the Gettys

“Joni, will you ever walk again?” Eliza’s little six-year-old eyes were earnestly fixed upon her. With her clear blue eyes sparkling back Joni replied, “Yes, I will! When I go to see Jesus in heaven, he will give me new legs, and I will walk again.” We moved out into the street after that and, walking beside her wheelchair toward the parking lot, began to sing, “Soon and very soon we are going to see the King.” Great hope sung along a little street in Pasadena, California.

You always sing when you are with Joni! And you never forget it. My daughter will never forget it. Joni does so well what every divine image bearer, every human being, has always been designed to do: sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord (see Eph. 5:19).

The book of Psalms—our Bible hymnal—teaches us to reach for lyric and melody through every journey of life. The psalms are our choirmaster but also the one singing beside us in the choir loft. They lead us, and they sing with us. The psalmist cries out, “Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.” Our singing to the Lord is not a blank or an escape, but wades through real life and drinks richly of Truth. Our singing to the Lord is to tell something, namely Christ’s salvation. Our singing to the Lord is for more than special occasions, but to be “day to day” (Ps. 96:2).

Joni is a “day-to-day” singer to the Lord. On good days. On sick days. On loud days. On whisper days. On bright days. On dark days. Especially the dark days. The song doesn’t stop. And when she has struggled to find the breath, she has been held up by those who sing with her and for her.

FOREWORD

It is a lifeline to her. Songs of the Lord weave through her days and have been like an evergreen garland of hope around her neck.

Throughout the Bible and throughout the history of good hymnody, we see that the songs and singing of the church are essential to all of life. They are the sound of our future. They gather in and they send out. They search the soul and they lift up. They teach the word and shape our prayers. They give courage to fight and guide toward green pastures for rest. They are deep wells and high mountaintops. They are a place to bring our children.

You will meet real-life stories in these pages. Testimonies to God's faithfulness, the Lord who has been with Joni and who is with all who look to him. He is the one great Savior reaching to all of us who each day bear burdens we cannot carry.

The poet Malcolm Guite describes Psalm 1 and the deep-rooted tree that is the believer's life:

Come to the place, where every breath is praise,
And God is breathing through each passing breeze.
Be planted by the waterside and raise
Your arms with Christ beneath these rooted trees.²

Enjoy the rustling leaves of these pages and the forest of saints who have gone before us. May you sing with them through the darkness of the night and the breaking of the day. Come and do what we have always loved to do—sing with Joni as she sings to him.

Sing wherever you are of the hope that is leading us home.

Keith and Kristyn Getty
NORTHERN IRELAND

Before You Begin

Have you ever wondered when Jesus sang? We can be sure he did in synagogue during Shabbat or at religious festivals in Jerusalem—I can see him as a boy standing with his family in the temple court, gazing up at the Levites who led everyone in song. Certainly he was taught to sing the Hallel during Jewish Passover—every good Jewish boy sang those psalms. Singing must have come naturally to Jesus.

Did he hum a psalm when he worked in his father’s carpenter shop? Surely he knew scores of hymns written by Asaph, David’s choirmaster. Walking with his disciples in a stiff sea breeze along the shores of Galilee, was Jesus the one who’d first strike up a tune? Did the others chime in? What about when his heart filled with so much joy that he had to spread his arms wide and let loose with a song?

There is only one place in the Bible where it is recorded that Jesus sang. The scene is not on a sunny hillside, not at a joy-filled wedding; it is not as Jesus crossed the sea in a boat with his friends, or as he took a solitary walk up a hill in the cool of early dawn. Rather, the scene for the song was in the upper room the night he was betrayed.

Matthew 26:30 describes the moment. It happened when Jesus gave his disciples the bread and wine. After that, “when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” Of all the times and places that God chose to have us remember his Son singing, it is when he was led to his death. This was the one horrible moment—recorded for posterity—when our Savior sang. Consider the implications for us:

He was on the brink of that great depth of misery into which he was about to plunge, and yet he would have them sing a hymn. What does he teach us by it? Does he not say to each of us, his followers, “I, your Master, by my example would instruct you to sing even when the last solemn hour is come. I am your singing-master . . . in which my dying voice shall lead you: notwithstanding all the griefs which overwhelm my heart, I will play the chief musician, and be to you the sweet singer of Israel.”³

It is no coincidence that a hymn echoed in Jesus’s heart as he stared into the jaws of incomprehensible suffering. And God boldly asks us to do the same when our time of great affliction arrives. “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21).

My Song in Suffering

I have lived with quadriplegia for more than half a century and have wrestled with chronic pain for much of that time. I struggle with breathing problems and am in an ongoing battle against cancer. All this makes for a perfect storm for discouragement.

Yet when my hip and back are frozen in pain, or it’s simply another weary day of plain paralysis, I strengthen myself with Jesus’s example in the upper room. My suffering Savior has taught me to always choose a song—a song that fortifies my faith against discouragement and breathes hope into my heart. And so I daily take up my cross to the tune of a hymn.

But not just any tune or lyrics. The song must possess enough spiritual muscle to barge into my soul and shake awake a hopeful response. It must be a hymn whose lyrics raise me onto a different plane spiritually; it must summon in me the emotional wherewithal to remember my station in



life so that I can rise above my circumstances. A well-crafted song of suffering—filled with truths about life and God—has power to do that. It grinds biblical truth into our souls, like a pestle grinding powder in a crucible.

Singing songs of suffering is not an option for Christ-followers. It is not a mere invitation. When Christians in Colossae were struggling to survive under the reign of the madman Nero, Paul ordered them, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). When the Ephesians were being persecuted and threatened with torture, Paul commanded them to encourage “one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Eph. 5:19). Paul himself takes his own advice when—bloodied, bruised, and shackled in jail—he boisterously sings a hymn at midnight, proving that spiritual songs can provide powerful ammunition for embattled Christians! (Acts 16:25).

Life is war. I wake up every morning feeling besieged by various afflictions. Nevertheless, I see myself in the choir of Levites who marched onto the battlefield in front of Jehoshaphat’s troops, singing, “Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever” (2 Chron. 20:21–22).

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In the morning, I tune my heart with a hymn. And at night when pain keeps me awake, when I cannot reposition myself and I don't want to bother my husband a third time, when my mind is so foggy I can barely put two sentences together in prayer, I lean on Scripture. But I also lean on stanzas of great hymns I've memorized over the years.

All the way my Savior leads me,
Cheers each winding path I tread;
Gives me grace for every trial,
Feeds me on the living Bread.
When my weary soul may falter,
And my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the Rock before me,
Lo, a Spring of joy I see!⁴

Let the Song Dwell in You Richly

Before you sing it, you must know it. And know it by heart.

My husband often brags about me to friends, saying, "Just hum a line from a 60s song; something by the Beatles or the Beach Boys—anything—and believe me, Joni will know it!" That is nothing to boast about, but Ken is fascinated that I know all these old songs by heart. Growing up with



older sisters who were glued to their transistor radios, my mind could not help but be saturated with songs by Elvis Presley or the Supremes. I unwittingly memorized scores of Top 40 hits by simply sharing a bedroom with my siblings.

There are far better anthems for our lives than frivolous songs that cater to the flesh, dull the spirit, or dig up tarnished memories and old regrets. There are courageous, celestial anthems to learn—hymns that carry us from strength to strength, from faith to faith, and from grace to grace. Brave songs that shore up our hearts for life's battles.

It is why hymns should be memorized. You've heard it said, "We are what we eat," but I say, "We are what we sing." Even now, I work hard to retrain my memory as I uproot those old pop tunes with their lyrics as worthless as cotton candy. In their place, I have hardwired my brain to default to valiant hymns. They now comprise the musical score for my life. Why give the precious real estate of my brain cells to things that weigh my spirit down rather than elevate it?

Memorizing hymns gives a head start in grasping Christian doctrine, and their melodies enrich us more than we realize. Our minds are programmed to remember patterns in music better than we remember patterns in words alone. "Every culture has songs and rhymes to help children learn the alphabet, numbers, and other lists. Even as adults, we are limited in our ability to memorize series or to hold them in mind





unless we use [musical] patterns—and the most powerful of these devices are rhyme, meter, and song.”⁵

God himself used music to help his people remember his words. As Israel was about to enter the promised land, God instructed Moses in Deuteronomy 31 to teach his people a song so that they would remember not only his promises but also his dire warnings. The lesson is clear: focus on singing words that God wants you to remember.

Your Songs of Suffering

You most likely picked up this book because, first, you are suffering. Whether physically or emotionally, it hurts bad and it’s hard. Second, you need a song. The music has drained from your heart, and you need bold, celestial anthems to fill the void. Songs that will help you go from strength to strength.

I want to be your song leader. The hymns in this volume are ones that I turn to when I need help in persevering through pain. I know most of them by memory, and when I sing them, even if ever so feebly, I sense the Spirit say, “Joni, this is rich stuff. Here’s truth you can feed on. Here’s

solid doctrine you've almost forgotten in your pain. Here's inspiration to help you keep going!"

This book will have fulfilled its purpose if you learn by heart the songs in each chapter.

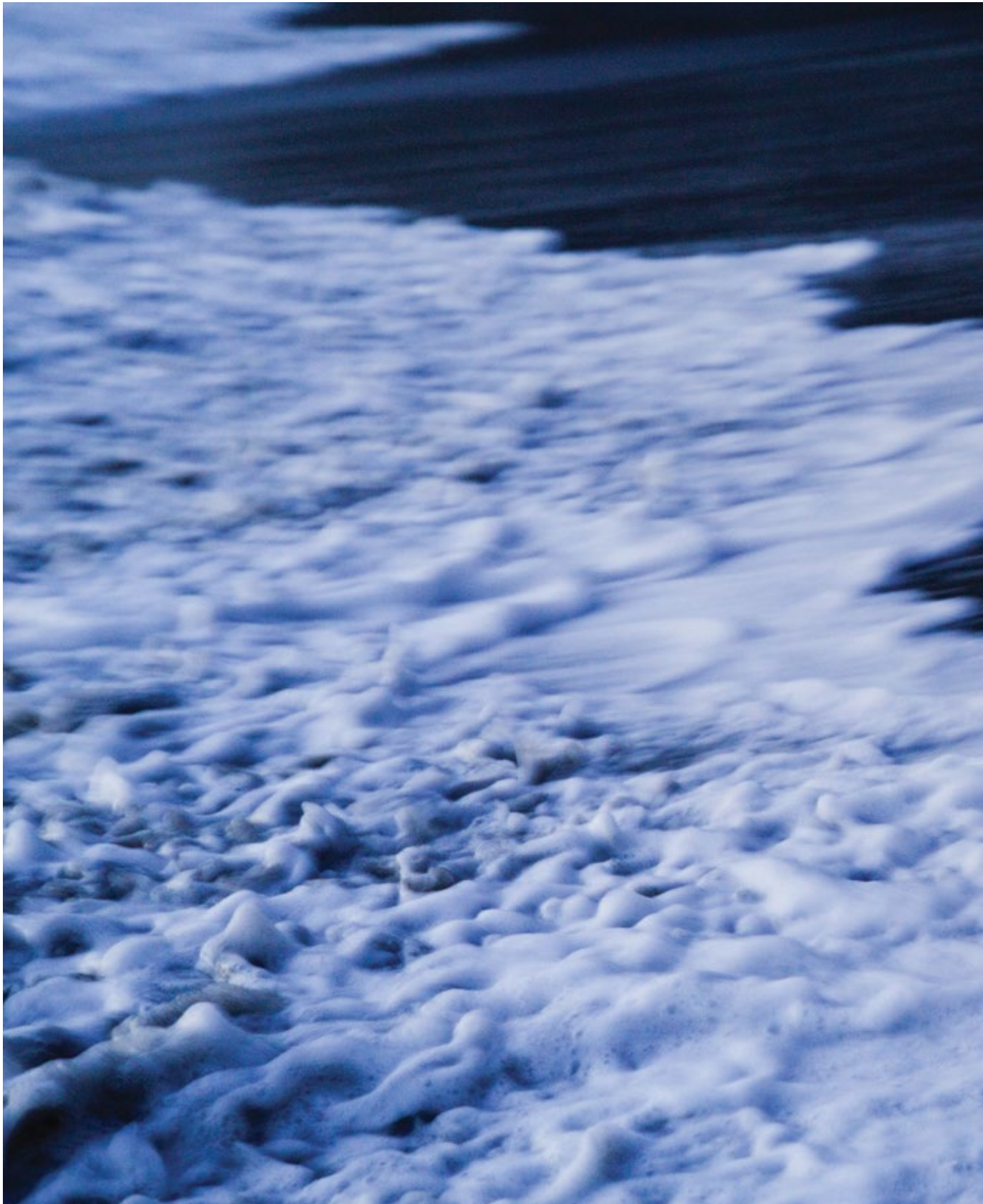
Also, you'll learn a devotional lesson based on each hymn. I have gleaned these lessons from either a heart-stirring event that has moved me or from a personal experience, often from my childhood. I also write about a few of my Pain Pals (precious suffering saints for whom I pray daily, friends who pick up their cross every day to the tune of a hymn).


I love all the songs I've chosen for this book. They are my companions in seasons of loneliness and my comrades when I am fighting discouragement. Their lyrics pour out consolation when my soul is weary, and they drag me back to the fold when my heart goes astray. Best of all, these hymns and spiritual songs provide rousing words of worship that are fitting for the King of the universe.

And take heart! Soon you will sing a different song of suffering. You will gladly sing it on that day when God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). John Piper describes this glorious song: "We will sing about suffering through eternity—*not our suffering, but Christ's*. We will remember that he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, and our hearts will overflow with a song of praise to the Lamb who endured the ultimate pain to redeem us."⁶

We will glorify our gallant Lord for choosing to sing on the night of his betrayal. We will lionize him for marching to his death with that same song reverberating in his heart. Join me in following in his steps. Turn up the wattage on the glory of your singing Savior, the man of sorrows who paved the way for you as he lifted a song before he lifted his cross.

Oh, may we do the same.





PART 1

Songs of Comfort

*For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.*

PSALM 62:5



1 Be Still My Soul

Be still, my soul! for God is on your side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain:
Leave to your God to order and provide,
Who through all changes faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul! your best, your heav'nly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul! for God will undertake
To guide the future surely as the past.
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be clear at last.
Be still, my soul! the waves and winds still know
The voice that calmed their fury long ago.

Be still, my soul! the hour is hast'ning on
When we shall be forever in God's peace;
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Love's joys restored, our strivings all shall cease.
Be still my soul! when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

—*Katharina von Schlegel (1752)*



Be still my soul . . . *you are building trust in God*

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

— PSALM 62:5

Hedged in.

Anxious and confined. Pressed into a space so constricting that you feel like you can't even get your breath. Have you been there?

The four walls of a sick room can feel confining, and so can “sheltering in place” during the coronavirus. For most of 2020, Ken and I did okay in the restricted space of our home, but then the insidious virus somehow crept through our front door. Contracting COVID-19 felt like a death sentence for me, a quadriplegic.

With chills and a high fever, I lay flat in bed, nervous and a little fearful. The tightness and gurgling in my bronchial passages made me feel claustrophobic, for I was not able to raise myself on my elbows to cough. COVID was like an invisible hand pressing an invisible pillow over my face. It was far worse at night.

Should I go to the hospital? No, I decided, they won't allow Ken to stay and help me. And I was in big need of help. Friends who normally chip in were either out of town or afraid of catching my virus and spreading it to their families. For several days, we were on our own. In the dark, I couldn't bring myself to awaken my sick husband, who also contracted the bug. I lay motionless for hours, biting my lip, watching the digital clock on my ceiling, and trying to fight off suffocating panic and pain.

I felt like the prophet who wrote, “He has walled me about so that I cannot escape” (Lam. 3:7). There’s a lot of lament in that verse. But there is also a lot of comfort. Do you see it? Who was the stonemason who walled in Jeremiah? Whose hedge and whose walls are we speaking about here? This is God’s hedge. Those are God’s walls. And at 2:00 a.m. in the dark, I knew it was God’s virus. His providence permitted it to invade my body. It wasn’t a random circumstance. It was God’s doing. And God was on my side.

It gave me confidence to whisper-sing the same hymn that had comforted me decades earlier when I was a frightened teenager in the hospital, facing a life of paralysis:

Be still, my soul! for God is on your side;
 Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain:
 Leave to your God to order and provide,
 Who through all changes faithful will remain.
 Be still, my soul! your best, your heav’nly Friend
 Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Claustrophobia is not always about congested lungs. Sometimes circumstances wall us in so tightly that we feel like we’re being crushed. Although it *feels* that way, the ironclad promise in 2 Corinthians 4:8 offers great assurance: “We are afflicted in every way, *but not crushed*.” Our bodies may suffer, but God will always provide enough grace so that our souls do not suffer harm.

True, walls are cold, hard, and foreboding, and even Robert Frost wrote, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.”⁷ But we can be at peace with the walls and ways of our sovereign God. He has *placed* us, not *misplaced* us. The love of our God is supreme and matchless, and he only confines us ’round for a wise and timely purpose. For those who believe in the

wisdom of a sovereign God, even a heartbreaking confinement can be a place of building trust.

As well as a place to sing.

As you sing stillness into your soul above your walls that confine, you may find that hedged-in place is the widest—and most wonderful—place to build trust in Jesus Christ.

*A high hedge cannot shut out our view of the skies, nor can it prevent the soul from looking up into the face of God. Because there is so little else to see, the hedged-in Christian cannot afford to hang his head. He must look up. It is that Christian who may possibly apprehend God more fully than the disciple who moves about freely and unconfined.**

*Shannon Gallatin, Pain Pal, For more information about the Pain Pals, see the acknowledgments on p. 186.

BE STILL MY SOUL

1. Be still, my soul! for God is on your side; bear pa-tient-ly the
 2. Be still, my soul! for God will un-der-take to guide the fu-ture
 3. Be still, my soul! the hour is has-t'ning on when we shall be for-

cross of grief or pain. Leave to your God to or-der and pro-vide;
 sure-ly as the past. Your hope, your con-fi-dence, let noth-ing shake;
 -ev-er in God's peace; When dis-ap-point-ment, grief, and fear are gone,

who through all chang-es faith-ful will re-main. Be still, my soul! your
 all now mys-te-rious shall be clear at last. Be still, my soul! the
 love's joys re-stored, our striv-ings all shall cease. Be still, my soul! when

best, your heav'n-ly Friend through thorn-y ways leads to a joy-ful end.
 waves and winds still know the voice that calmed their fu-ry long a-go.
 change and tears are past, all safe and bless-ed we shall meet at last.