

The Encourager

Helping People Live Courageously

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A Publication of Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope

*So my heart exults, my very soul rejoices,
my body, too, will rest securely,
for you will not abandon my soul . . .
you will reveal the path of life to me,
give me unbounded joy in your presence,
and at your right hand everlasting pleasures.*

(Psalm 16:9-11, Jerusalem Bible)

When we suffer, one of the things we hunger for the most is the feeling of joy. We long to experience happiness, to laugh, to feel lighthearted, to feel comforted, to feel hope, to look forward to the future with delight rather than dread. But suffering is not conducive to joy. Suffering is one of the challenges on the journey of life that makes joy very hard to find.

This was true for me when I was in and out of the hospital, fighting my battle against cancer. I felt fear, anxiety, frustration, doubt, uncertainty, but I rarely felt joy. It was true for Jan when she fought her battle against depression. She felt the vast, dark emptiness of depression, but she couldn't feel joy. And the feeling of joy has been just as elusive for many, many others who have journeyed through suffering and pain.

But the good news about joy is that it is out there—somewhere—even when we can't feel it.

Jan and I have found that the ultimate joy, the promise of joy that will never fail, is found in the salvation that Jesus Christ offers us. True joy comes in knowing that God cares enough about me that He has opened the doors of heaven to me. The promise of joy is that someday, no matter what good or bad experiences I go through on this earth, I will live with Jesus in a place where there are no more tears and there is no more suffering.

Because God's ultimate promise of joy is out there, it is possible to see glimpses of joy—even when we suffer. I am not in any way saying that experiencing joy is easy. To experience the feeling of joy in the midst of acute suffering is very difficult. For example, I couldn't fix my thoughts on things that would allow me to experience joy because I was so consumed by the suffering itself. But at

times I did experience a sense of joy, and it came through the loving care and comfort of others.

Those precious glimpses of joy came through friends who, even though they may not have understood, still allowed me to talk about whatever I needed to talk about. It came through the faces of those who loved me and didn't beat around the bush but helped me deal with reality. It came through the words of the Bible that were shared with me when I didn't have the energy to seek them out myself.

When we receive comfort and encouragement from others, we receive a bit of joy. The love, concern, and encouragement of others stands out to me as the clearest reminder of God's care and concern for me. And this is true for many other people who have endured a time of suffering. So often people say, "I don't know how I would have gotten through

this had it not been for the encouragement of the people around me." This is just the way the Bible tells us comfort will come. The Bible describes God as "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4 *NIV*).

That comfort is part of the joy Jan and I, and the staff at Outreach of Hope, want to share with you. We know how easily pain and suffering can rob us of joy. Because we discovered the reality of joy in the midst of our personal struggles, we want to share that joy with you. As Christmas, the season of joy, approaches, we hope that you, too, will discover the reality of joy. Our desire is that the stories and insights of others that we share with you through this issue will point your heart toward joy. ☺

The Promise of Joy

by Dave Dravecky

Beware the Joy Stealers

In his book, *Turning Toward Joy*, David Jeremiah quotes what he calls a prescription for unhappiness. "Follow this prescription faithfully for two weeks," he promises, "and I guarantee you unhappiness!"

- ◆ Make little things bother you; don't just let them, *make* them.
- ◆ Lose your perspective on things, and keep it lost. Don't put first things first.
- ◆ Get yourself a good worry—one about which you cannot do anything but worry.
- ◆ Be a perfectionist: condemn yourself and others for not achieving perfection.
- ◆ Be right, always right, perfectly right all the time. Be the only one who is right and be rigid about your rightness.
- ◆ Don't trust or believe people, or accept them at anything but their worst and weakest. Be suspicious. Impute ulterior motives to them.
- ◆ Always compare yourself unfavorably to others, which is the guarantee of instant misery.
- ◆ Take personally, with a chip on your shoulder, everything that happens to you that you don't like.
- ◆ Don't give yourself wholeheartedly or enthusiastically to anyone or to anything.
- ◆ Make unhappiness the aim of your life, instead of bracing for life's barbs through a "bitter with the sweet" philosophy.

Source: *Turning Toward Joy*, published by Victor Books. Original prescription from: *Illustrations Unlimited*, James S. Hewett, ed., ©1988, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

Lord of Joy . . . You promise joy in the midst of our suffering, so please let me know your joy today as I persevere in faithful service and as I demonstrate true commitment in my tasks. Give me your smile, let me feel your peace dancing in my heart. That, for me will be true joy.

Joni Eareckson Tada

From *Diamonds in the Dust* by Joni Eareckson Tada. Published by Zondervan Publishing House.



What Kind of Joy

by Steven Curtis Chapman

What kind of joy is this
That counts it a blessing to suffer
What kind of joy is this
That gives the prisoner his song
What kind of joy could stare
death in the face
And see it as sweet victory
This is the joy of a soul that's
forgiven and free.

What kind of joy is this
The Father has promised his
children
What kind of joy is this
That Jesus has come to reveal
What kind of joy could give hope
in this world
To someone just like you and me
This is the joy of a soul that's
forgiven and free
I've found this joy for my soul is
forgiven and free.

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Discovering Joy

by Jan Dravecky

Joys are always on the way to us. They are always traveling to us through the darkness of the night. There is never a night when they are not coming.

Amy Carmichael

If joy is a promised gift from God, then it was one that for most of my life was either hidden from me or that I hadn't yet learned to open. And I've met countless others who have felt just as I did. The journey of discovering true joy was, for me, long and difficult. I share it with you in the hope that it might make your journey of discovering joy less of an obstacle course than mine was. I share it as a way of offering hope to those who believe that joy is an unattainable gift.

It is amazing to me that many people who meet me now say, "Jan, your face radiates so much joy . . . it gives me hope." But it has not always been this way. There was a time, after the deaths of my parents and during Dave's battle with cancer, when I experienced an oppressive depression and knew no joy. I remember lying in bed, feeling a black fog engulf every part of my life. Nothing looked good; life had lost all joy. I couldn't feel God's presence, and I couldn't even remember what it felt like to believe in Him. Nor could I remember what joy felt like.

Total exhaustion, burnout, and depression drove me to my bed for a solid month, but staying in bed wasn't helping. So I forced myself to get out of bed, although I was still very weak. I sat at my dining room table, sipping a cup of

tea and gazing out the window at the flowers in my backyard garden. I sat there wishing life could go back to the way it used to be. The leaves on the trees were swaying in the breeze and shimmering in the sunlight. Their lovely spring green was deepening into a shade that heralds the coming of summer. I watched a sparrow hop from branch to branch, stopping to chirp as if tuning the notes of his song. He seemed to sing a song of joy, a song I couldn't yet sing, but his bright song reminded me that joy was still alive somewhere. For that, I was grateful.

At that moment, an impression came to me unbidden. It was this: *All your life, Jan, you have tried to be in total control, to remove pain and create your own happiness by manipulating people and circumstances. It has been like a juggling act for you. But Jan, it's not up to you. You need to let go. If you let go, I'm going to show you a joy you've never known. . . .*

Letting go was not easy. It wasn't something I knew how to do. Letting go meant learning to trust God and His promises no matter what my circumstances were.

I did not learn this overnight, but God proved Himself faithful. And one spring day three years later, I was sitting at my dining room table, sipping a cup of tea and looking out the window at the mountains. The pine trees surrounding

our home were swaying gently in the breeze, and the flowers in the pots on my deck were blooming, heralding the coming of summer. I had a sense that I had experienced this day before.

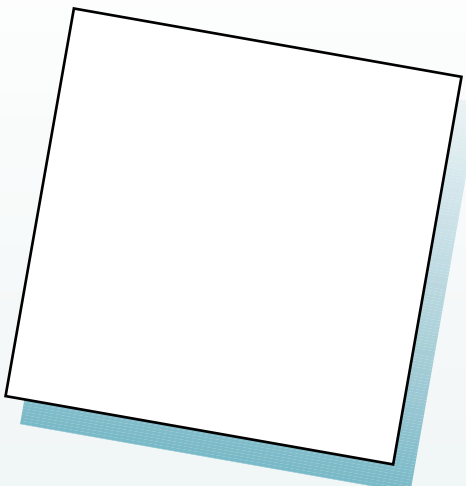
Then it dawned on me. This day reminded me of the day I was sitting at my dining room table in Ohio, the day when the Lord told me to let go, the day He promised He would show me a joy I'd never known.

As I recalled that promise, I realized that the joy God promised me had become a part of my everyday life, a joy that comforts the soul. I have a joy in knowing that God is my Father, that He cares for me. I have joy in knowing that I don't have to be in constant control of other people or every situation and in knowing that I don't have to fear the future or strain to make it unfold the way I think it should. I have joy in knowing that the fate of the world does not rest on my shoulders—but on His.

Today, I focus on living, loving, and trusting God. I enjoy what each day brings, and cast all my cares on God as they come. This is the joy I'd never known! 🌸

Excerpted from *A Joy I'd Never Known*, by Jan Dravecky with Connie Neal. Published by Zondervan Publishing House. To order an autographed copy, refer to the order envelope inside this issue.

🌸
The sparrow's bright song reminded me that joy was still alive somewhere. For that, I was grateful.



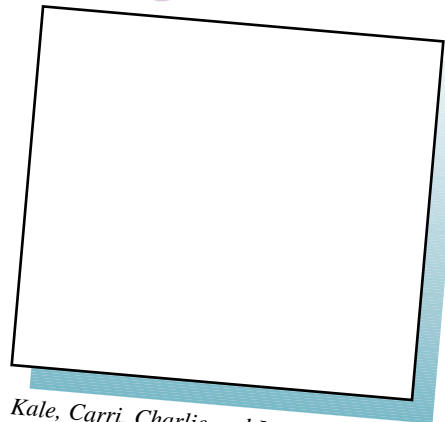
Choosing Joy

What is it that enables a man who cannot walk, cannot speak, cannot breathe, and cannot eat to live a life that is so filled with joy that it overflows to brighten the lives of others?

For Charlie Wedemeyer, who for 18 years has fought a physically debilitating battle with Lou Gehrig's disease, living in joy has been part gift and part choice. During the early years, the battle robbed Charlie of joy. At one point, he told his wife Lucy that he would rather be dead than to live as he was. Her response was that she would rather have him as he was than not to have him at all. When Lucy expressed that love for him, she gave Charlie a precious gift that prompted him to make a conscious choice to not only live, but to live life as fully and joyfully as possible. And the Wedemeyer family does live life with abundant joy.

Humor in all forms, from jokes to pranks to just plain silly fun, helps brighten the hard work of helping Charlie live. Charlie's motto, "any excuse for a party," made zany parties a trademark of the Wedemeyer household during their children's teenage years. One time Charlie insisted on sneaking into a hospital long after visiting hours to throw an impromptu party for a teenage friend. No one on the hospital staff ever thought to stop a nurse pushing an obviously sick man in a wheelchair down the corridor! Even the balloon bouquet Lucy carried didn't give them away.

Another time, Charlie was released from an extended hospital stay so that he could go home "to die." Two days later, the whole family, including two nurses and all of Charlie's medical equipment, boarded a plane for a vacation in Hawaii. Their



Kale, Carri, Charlie and Lucy Wedemeyer

first stop was at the airport gift shop where they purchased a beautiful tropical beach postcard that they mailed to Charlie's doctor!

Through it all, Charlie is convinced that God can salvage good out of any circumstance. Believing that God has chosen him to bring His message of hope and encouragement to others, Charlie has chosen the path of joy.

"Sometimes," he warns, "we'll all be faced with some circumstance that will seem too difficult to cope with. When that time comes, we have to make a choice because God gives each one of us the power of choice. We can choose to be miserable, feel sorry for ourselves, throw our own private pity party, and cause everyone around us to be miserable, too. Or we can choose to face our trials with God's help, knowing that we'll come out the other side as stronger people for the experience. We all have that choice."

As Charlie's friend, Tim Hansel, reminds us, "Pain and suffering is inevitable, but misery is optional." Charlie stands as a powerful testimony to the importance of making that choice. 🍷

Source: Taken from *Charlie's Victory*, by Charlie and Lucy Wedemeyer with Gregg Lewis ©1993 by Charlie and Lucy Wedemeyer. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

Just for the Joy of It

The sage advice of her two young daughters helped Carita Girman maintain her perspective during a recent battle with recurrent ovarian cancer. Following one particularly exhausting dose of chemotherapy, three-year-old Maria advised, "If that doctor tries to give you that awful medicine again, spit at him. If that doesn't work, bite him. And if that doesn't work, say 'Na na na na na' and stick out your tongue!"

Of course, Carita's daughters weren't the only ones with a healthy perspective. Inspired by the fact that she lives in the home state of David Letterman, Carita came up with her own "Top Ten Reasons to Like Chemotherapy!"

- 10 You are not expected to cook dinner when nauseated.
- 9 You can scare any solicitors by answering the door bareheaded.
- 8 You get to be named a national symbol (Bald Eagle) by your darling children.
- 7 You save money on haircuts and hair products.
- 6 You don't have to shave.
- 5 You don't have to diet.
- 4 You can be a couch potato for a few days without the guilt.
- 3 You have a more believable excuse than "I have a headache."
- 2 You never have a "Bad Hair Day."
- 1 You get more frequent visits and phone calls from out-of-town family and friends.

Reprinted by permission of *Coping*, magazine, September/October 1995.

Unwrapping the Gift of Joy

Joys are all around us. Like gifts under the Christmas tree, they sit expectantly, waiting to be opened. Placed like breadcrumbs by a loving Father, they mark the way home to the place where joy reigns forever. Joys are sweet promises of the coming fulfillment for every ache and longing in our hearts.

But in the frantic pace of life, under the crushing weight of a soul in pain, the gift of joy can seem a distant memory. Remember when everything around us beckoned our discovery? Our touch? Our unwrapping? It still does!

Joys are all around us, wrapped with loving care and adorned in beauty, waiting to be discovered, or—perhaps—rediscovered.

J

Just listening to the sound of rain on the roof
January's icy kiss leaving it's lacy imprint on the window pane
Joining in singing the national anthem
Jumping in a puddle—without your boots
Jesus

O

Offering the last seat—yours—to someone in need
Okra on someone else's plate
Old-fashioned ice cream on a hot day
Open arms when you come home
Others whose needs keep our own in perspective

Y

Yards overflowing with flowers
Yarn lovingly knit into a custom-made sweater
Yearling colts running the fence line
Yellow sunflowers nodding in surrender to fall
You in God's eyes

Father God,

My heart longs to feel joy. My eyes have grown dim, my step heavier, and my smile weary from its absence. Give me the eyes to see Your promised gift in my path, the desire to unwrap its contents, and the hope in my soul that something good awaits. Quiet my spirit with Your peace and the knowledge that You are in control of all things so I can rest. Although my vessel may be worn and weathered, help my heart to be childlike again, anxious to discover the joys You have given me here and now.

The Joy of Giving

The love, kindness, and encouraging gifts of others brought joy to Jan and me during a time when nothing else did. We have not forgotten the joy we received during our struggle, and our desire is to pass that joy on to others. Today we receive joy through the act of giving love, kindness, and encouraging gifts through the ministry of Outreach of Hope.

Many of you have asked how we specifically encourage those who battle cancer and amputation. In addition to offering prayer support, personal contact, correspondence, resource referral, and encouraging literature, we share the gift of encouragement in tangible ways . . .

DO NOT LOSE HEART Encouragement Baskets are gift baskets that we are able to send to some of our families who have lost loved ones through cancer. They are filled with:

- ◆ Encouraging books such as *Heaven, Your Real Home*, by Joni Eareckson Tada or *Where Is God When It Hurts*, by Philip Yancey
- ◆ “Do Not Lose Heart” mugs with specialty cocoa or tea
- ◆ Personal gifts—from calligraphy to t-shirts to potpourri to stationery—selected for each family member

In the midst of the trauma and loss of serious illness, these gifts bring a double blessing. They provide practical tools of encouragement and are a loving reminder that mercy and compassion are available even in the darkest of times.

DO NOT LOSE HEART Duffel Bags are the newest gifts of encouragement that we give to children who suffer from cancer. One in every five people we encounter in their battle against cancer is eighteen years of age or younger. The desire of our hearts is to abundantly bless and encourage these special children.

The duffel bags are designed to be used for trips to and from treatment. Each includes:

- ◆ “Do Not Lose Heart” water bottle
- ◆ Autographed 8 x10 photo of Dave’s Comeback game
- ◆ Autographed baseball
- ◆ *Dave’s Dugout* newsletter
- ◆ Plus a teddy bear, journal, t-shirt, *Courage Award Sticker Book*, or other gift that is appropriate for the child’s age and condition

We count it a privilege to comfort and uplift those who suffer from cancer or amputation. Bringing true joy into the presence of suffering often involves more than offering a smile and an encouraging word. It means pointing the way to the Father of love and mercy who gives us the strength, the joy, and the hope we need to live in the midst of circumstances that threaten to leave us feeling helpless and hopeless.



“Thank you with all my heart for such a lovely surprise. I just could not imagine what I could be receiving from you all. Much to my surprise, a beautiful basket of goodies, treasures I will hold dear to my heart forever I wondered what I did to deserve such love. Thank you so very much.”

Yvonne





RETURNED TO SENDER!

Dear Friends in Christ,

A day does not go by that I don't think of all of you, your ministry and the joy of the Lord that you spread. . . .

In November, when I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, I felt I understood the power of prayer, but I had absolutely no measure of just how powerful prayer could be. Last week, I asked my wife if it is possible to be going through malignant cancer and feel the happiest I have ever felt in my 61 years on this earth. My comment was more of a statement than a question because God is providing, through His love and grace, the means and perseverance to deal with this situation.

I am keeping a chronicle of the special and extraordinary blessings God is bestowing on me as I go through the cancer. What I am finding is utterly amazing . . . God is good.

L.D. Gilbert
Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear Mr. Dravecky,

I like your book. I think I am going to be a Major League baseball player for the Giants. I played Little League for the Indians and the White Sox. They didn't pick me to pitch, but I wanted to. Oh well, maybe this year I will.

I have a joke. Why did the coaches bring the ladder to the baseball game? Because the Giants were playing!

Please write back,

Daniel Newman
Toledo, Ohio

Letters are a precious gift—to give and to receive. Many such gifts are mailed each week at Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope, and we receive several in return that contain beautiful expressions of love and appreciation. The encouragement others share with us we share with you, because your prayers and support make the delivery of this mail possible . . . both ways. Thank you for encouraging us!

Dear Friends at Outreach of Hope,

Thank you so much for the wonderful love basket you sent. My kids and I were thrilled to find something special for each one of us in it!

Your ministry is a godsend for so many hurting families. It makes all the difference just knowing there are brothers and sisters in Christ who understand our pain and are praying. God is using your ministry of comfort and encouragement in a mighty way.

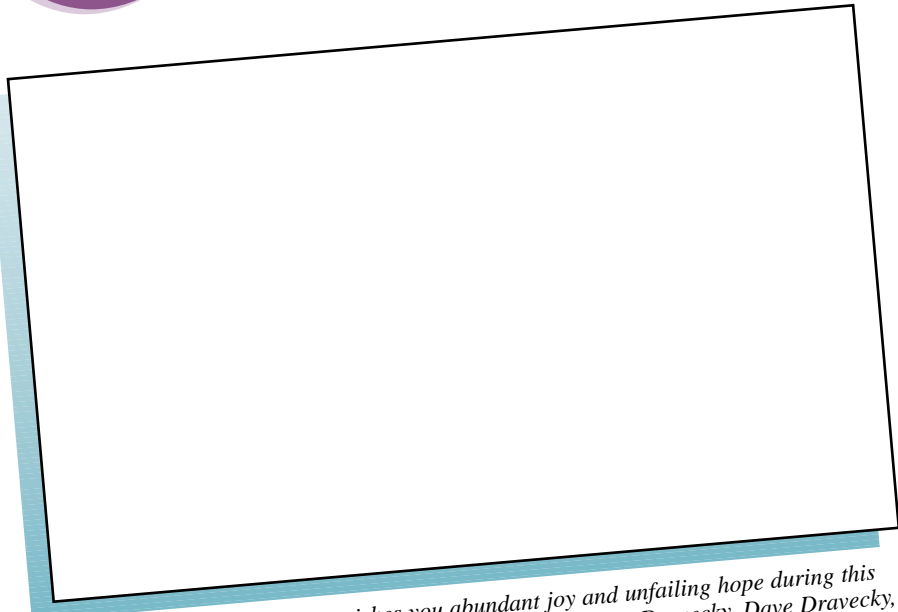
Melanie Benninghoven
Ft. Collins, Colorado

Dear Dave Dravecky,

I read your book and I really enjoyed it.
I also play for the Giants--well, Little League.
I play catcher, pitcher, and second base.
When I played catcher my first game, I wore a man's size cup. A big boy got up to bat and hit a foul. I threw off my mask to try to catch the ball. I missed, but my cup started rolling down my leg! Boy was that tough on me--having a lump roll down my leg while a pretty girl watched me!
Well, thank you for listening.

Justin Pilgrim
Lake Almanor, California

Joyful Greetings!



The staff at Outreach of Hope wishes you abundant joy and unfailing hope during this Christmas season. Seated left to right: D.J. McCormack, Jan Dravecky, Dave Dravecky, Donna Everson, Carey Hubert, Becky Wolf, Barb McClure, Wayne McClure and Diana Ginn. Standing: Bob Knepper, Teri Knepper, Kathy Lance, Susan Strong, Janine Tiedemann and Kim Jones. Not pictured: Ruth Spaethe.

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Romans 5:2-4 (NIV)

Our Mission

Offering comfort, hope, and encouragement through Jesus Christ to those who suffer from cancer or amputation. We accomplish this mission by offering prayer support, personal contact, correspondence, resource referral, and the gift of encouraging literature.



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The Encourager is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you've read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don't throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

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EDITORS Stephen & Amanda Sorenson
DESIGNER Beverly Seefeldt

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