

# Choose Hope

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**The book of Jeremiah has taught me how to choose hope in times of trouble.** Few people in the Bible struggled as much as Jeremiah, who was called before his birth to be a prophet and began his ministry at 17. He spent most of his life alone, commanded not to marry, suffering, and proclaiming the word of the Lord to people who hated him.

He is called the “weeping prophet” because he grieved for his people. *He understands pain that seemingly has no end.* Jeremiah only speaks of joy when referring to the word of God (Jeremiah 15:16) and the future, but there is little other joy in Jeremiah’s life. ***But Jeremiah holds on to hope, which is what we most need in our suffering.***

**A friend who lives with intractable pain mentioned that the phrase, “choose joy” isn’t as appropriate to deep suffering as “choose hope.”** Sometimes it’s hard to feel joy, and hearing others glibly state, “choose joy” can feel like pouring vinegar into an open wound. (Proverbs 25:20 NIV). It’s painful. But hope is different.

***Hope is clinging to the Lord and his promises, trusting that he is with us, is using our trials for something greater than we can imagine, and that our pain will end one day.***

But for now we can cry.

*Hope acknowledges that while what we see and feel may be excruciating right now, it will not always be this way.* As Paul reminds us, “hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:24-25) ***Our hope is guaranteed because it’s a living hope, in a person not an outcome, but we must wait patiently for it to unfold.***

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, I’ve found threads that have shown me how to hold onto hope in trouble. Not only does it accurately describe the pain I felt, but it’s also given me a clear direction, promises to cling to and a glorious vision of the future.

## The pain:

These wailings describe how I’ve often felt in suffering: “My joy is gone; grief is upon me; my heart is sick within me” (Jeremiah 8:18 ESV) and ‘I am overwhelmed with trouble! Haven’t I had enough pain already? And now the LORD has added more! I am worn out from sighing and can find no rest.’ (Jeremiah 45:3 NLT)

**In the middle of intense pain, physical or emotional, we can only think about surviving. We are overwhelmed and exhausted, worn out, often even struggling to breathe. Pain can be all consuming. We long for rest but can’t find it.**

Jeremiah has taught me the value of lament in those times. In lament we turn to God, pouring out our pain, trusting that he is listening, cares and will respond. ***The Lord isn’t honored by our sanitized words of insincere praise but by our genuine response, whether it be anguish or agony, as we look to him in hope.***

## The direction:

One of the challenges in suffering is knowing how to pray, what to expect, where to go next. God's responses are unique to each person, but I have found direction in Scripture as I've asked the Lord.

After my ex-husband left, I wasn't sure where to put my hope. I'd been praying daily for so long, begging God to bring true repentance, restoration, and reconciliation, but it hadn't happened. I remember asking God to show me where to put my heart and how to live in this place of uncertainty. I turned to Jeremiah 29 and was drawn to the beginning where the Lord said, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce..... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5, 7)

Those words provided a new direction for me. *I needed to keep praying but rather than waiting and expecting things to go back to the way they were, I was to put down roots where I was. To live and not put my life on hold. To look forward to the future rather than looking longingly at the past.*

### **The promise:**

God has good plans for us all. **We can trust that he is writing a good story with our lives even though the pages, or even chapters, we've been living in feel dark.** He has rich promises for us, and he will fulfill them all. The Lord reminded the Israelites and us, "I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise... For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29: 10-13)

Many of Jeremiah's words about the future are true for us today. When we call upon God, he hears us. He is near. When we seek him, we will find him. The God who is with us, walking closely beside us, even carrying us in our suffering, is guaranteeing a hope for the future. But there are some promises of reward and redemption that we haven't received yet. Many saints "though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised" (Hebrews 11:39) on earth but have received far more in heaven.

### **The future:**

The picture of what is coming in Jeremiah 31 is magnificent. God says, "I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow. My people shall be satisfied with my goodness. There is reward for your work... there is hope for your future. I will satisfy the weary soul and every languishing soul I will replenish."

This is our future. **Even when every day feels like a struggle, in Christ we all have a beautiful inheritance and a glorious future.** We will see our Savior face-to-face and will be filled to overflowing with a soul-satisfying joy that cannot be taken away. ***We aren't promised a reprieve from suffering in this life, though many of us will have one, but we are promised crowns of glory and unending delight in the next.***

No matter what we are struggling with today, Jeremiah can speak to our pain. Even when life feels desperate and hopeless, when we are overwhelmed by trouble that leaves us exhausted, we can lament to the Lord and encourage one another to choose hope. A hope that is Spirit-breathed and will never disappoint. A hope that will sustain us when we feel bereft of peace and have forgotten what happiness is. A hope that reminds that the steadfast love of the Lord never ends and that his mercies are new every morning.