

# DFH Episode 07 - Ann Voskamp

**Vaneetha:** [00:00:00] Well Ann, welcome to the Desperate for Hope podcast. I am so excited for you to be here. I don't know if you remember, but we met 11 years ago and it was the weekend that my divorce was final. And it was one of the most difficult times that I, I had been through something so gut wrenching and just to sit and have coffee with you, was amazing. And just our conversation, like when you're in the midst of a trial, every word somebody says to you, you hold close. And I felt that way about our conversation.

**Ann Voskamp:** I can remember you wrote me a letter. Was it before or after we met, Vaneetha?

**Vaneetha:** It was after, after we met.

**Ann Voskamp:** And I remember it was, you wrote the letter talking about how you were going to live, it's 2nd Chronicles. Yes, yes. And the King doesn't know what he's going to do. [00:01:00] And he goes and he spreads that letter before the Lord and he said, oh Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are upon you. And he gathers the people with that overwhelming hoard of an attack coming against him.

And he chooses. He chooses to go out and sing, "Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever. I, I remember reading that letter from you, Vaneetha, in your handwriting and just weeping. Realizing that, thanksgiving is our weapon I mean I wrote about it in I think it's Waymaker. It's doxology or dark.

We get to decide. And, and it wasn't, I mean, it was your divorce and there were all kinds of, a whole consolation of issues that... suffering that you were walking through and your testimony, Vaneetha, cut me right through to the quick. Could I take in the midst, could I have a, [00:02:00] a gratitude muscle that I was working day in and day out, practicing giving thanks so that when I was in a difficult situation,

I have like a memory muscle, gratitude muscle that would give thanks to the Lord his love and endures forever, and let that slay the enemy in my, my own thinking. Go ahead and destroy the dark. You've ministered and disciplined me in profound ways, Vaneetha. Thank you.

**Vaneetha:** Well, you. you, did that for me. And I feel like that passage reading it, it really brought back a lot of the words that you had spoken about gratitude.

So it, it's amazing how God uses, you know, something, He shows one of us and then it, it builds on something He shows a another one of us. And just, that's the body of Christ, which is amazing.

**Ann Voskamp:** I think for all of us in the midst of, in suffering, in the midst of crises, in the midst of overwhelm, That one line from [00:03:00] scripture. Lord, I don't know what to do. Like that, that is the cry so much of the human heart in the midst of suffering. And what does this say? Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are on you.

And if our eyes are on Him, what is the natural outcome of that gratitude? Look at all of the, all of the things I can give thanks if my eyes are really on Jesus. I start to see the good and the gifts and the grace and the hands of God right here. Gratitude is the natural outflow of our eyes actually being fixed.

We actually know if our eyes are fixed on Him, if gratitude becomes the cadence of our days. So thank you just for being part of actually, incarnating that truth from scripture and embodying that for me, Vaneetha.

I mean, I go back to it all the time. I, a friend and I are going through difficult times in the last, oh, a year. We keep going , oh, we don't know what to do, but what happens, our eyes are on You. And if our eyes are on [00:04:00] Him, our hearts are on fire with thanksgiving.

**Vaneetha:** amen. Wow. Well, Ann, I'd love for you just to tell our listeners just about your family, what your day-to-day life is like right now.

**Ann Voskamp:** yes, we, we live in the great white north up in Canada. I am married to a fine farmer, who farms full-time. We have, grace and the kindness of the Lord. We have seven children, from the age of 28 down to eight. Six biological children we had in 10 years, and then 10 years later we adopted little Shiloh, from China.

And where I'm sitting, I was just saying to you earlier, Vaneetha, our youngest biological daughter, Shalom. She just graduated from high school last weekend, and then she turned 18 this week. So come this fall, Lord willing, Shalom goes off to, Redeemer University and we will [00:05:00] have six children who have launched out into the world, and we will just have little Shiloh at home with Darryl and I.

So a huge transition from a house of seven rambunctious, rowdy kids to just, Lord willing in the fall it'll just be Shiloh.

**Vaneetha:** Oh, great. Oh, that's wonderful. Ann this podcast is about suffering and your story and your suffering is deep and layered.

And one of the things I've appreciated about you, Ann, one of many things, is your vulnerability, your willingness to share about topics a lot of people don't wanna talk about.

So thank you just in advance for that.

**Ann Voskamp:** I think everyone is suffering Vaneetha behind closed doors and unless, unless we offer people the gift of going first and actually putting words to all kinds of unspoken broken, people feel alone in their brokenness. And they go, I, I don't know how to take the theology of scripture and incarnate it and put, in my life, I don't know how to put flesh and bones on this.

So the more we can talk about our suffering, it offers people two things. Witness, I'm with you in this. You're not alone. And it offers you witness.

[00:07:00] I see you because I know what that's like. And I mean, which is exactly who God says He is. He's Emmanuel, the God who is with us.

God who tells Hagar that he sees her. So I think, I think if we can, I mean, in the Broken Way... do not be afraid of a broken thing. That's exactly where God is doing a new thing. And my book The Broken Way, it was all really about can we share on our unspoken, broken with each other and trust that in that brokenness, God is resurrecting new things out of this?

So I think if we can take our masks off that everything is all perfect, and actually share our brokenness, it becomes like bread broken and given that can sustain each of us with the grace and kindness of the Lord.

**Vaneetha:** Amen. Yeah, so, so you have been so willing. To talk about your unspoken broken.

**Ann Voskamp:** Mm

**Vaneetha:** I would just love to, if you could just begin with your childhood. You went through a, a tragedy at age four, and just if you could talk about that and just the [00:08:00] repercussions maybe in your life, in your family's life.

**Ann Voskamp:** yeah. I think we live in a broken world and trauma visits all of us at some point in time. Because sin has entered the world. And for me as a little girl, I was, I just had my fourth birthday. I was standing at the kitchen sink

in our farmhouse, and my mom was washing dishes and she had, she actually just had, my youngest baby sister was only three weeks old. She got her ready for a, a doctor's appointment and put her in a baby carrier out on a picnic table. And my brother, who was, he's only 13 months younger than I am, so three years old, and my 18 month old sister, Amy, we're all outside with a brand new baby.

Mom had gotten them all outside. We were getting ready to go into town. To take the three week old baby out into a doctor's appointment, but [00:09:00] my mom just wanted to finish up the dishes, so I was helping her finish up the dishes. And, a service truck came into our farm yard and little Amy had seen a stray cat go across the farm yard, and she was toddling after the stray cat and the service truck driver did not see her.

And at the kitchen sink window, mom and I saw Amy was struck and crushed and killed in the farm yard. And, and I think for all of us in a moment, our lives can change beyond comprehension. Actually even just yesterday, my mom was here visiting and, she apologized. She said, oh, Ann, I'm, I'm so sorry you saw any of that. And I said, oh, mama, [00:10:00] that's not your fault. Like, mama, we have to trust that God is sovereign and on His throne. And things happen.

The story is written in ways that we wouldn't want. We think, oh, why is this story written that way? I would never write this story that way. But I believe, Vaneetha, with every fiber of my being, He is the word. He's the author of a good story. This line in the story might not be good. The chapter in the story might be beyond painful, but the one who says He is the word is the author of a good redemptive story in its whole.

And so while I might not know, I might know why, Lord, why would you do it this way? The one who says He's the way, knows the way [00:11:00] this story connects to that story, which has ramifications for this story, which impacts this story. All of this is a world of ways. All the, the ways of all of our stories intersect and, and impact, and shift and change each other's story.

And the only one that can orchestrate and navigate and understand the ways all the stories interact is the one who says He's the way Himself. And I, if I question that, I'm saying that... saying in some ways, Vaneetha, that I'm God, that I know more than God knows. I've spent a lot of time trying to process the trauma of what that little four year old girl saw and the fallout for my family, my parents, my mother's a believer now, but my parents weren't believers then. And my father said, I remember as a child, my father's saying, well, if there is someone up there, He fell asleep at the wheel that day.[00:12:00]

And I understand that from a perspective of someone who's not a believer. But when we open up scripture, scripture tells us who God truly is, that He is a God who does not sleep nor slumber. He is the God who counts the hairs on our heads and knows if a sparrow falls. How much more he cares for us. I take deep, deep solace, Vaneetha, in the fact that nothing happens. I think it's Kay Arthur who says, nothing happens unless it comes filtered through his fingers of love. And He is, He's the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. He's the Good Shepherd who lays down His, His actual body and becomes the door of the sheep fold. So nothing can come into my, that sheet fold, unless it passes through Jesus who says He is the door. Jesus who says He is the Good Shepherd. [00:13:00] So if He's let it pass into my fold, I know that ultimately He's going to unfold it into good in His time and in His way. I might not see it this side of heaven, but that's part of me trusting that my Abba father is on the throne. And He knows far more than I do.

**Vaneetha:** Yeah.

**Ann Voskamp:** So for my parents, My mother, um, was in, I mean now as a mother of seven, I can't imagine the trauma of watching a child killed so horrifically in front of you. So my mom was, to work through that pain was in and out of psych wards, during my childhood. Which caused, had ripple effects. And for a family that didn't, when you don't have Jesus to go to, when you don't have the cross to go to the problems, [00:14:00] the pain and the suffering in this world has to go somewhere.

And if you don't take it to the cross and allow Jesus in his perfection to absorb all of that pain, that pain is just downloaded out into the world. Like it, if we don't deal with it, let Jesus deal with it at the foot of the cross. If we don't allow Jesus to take it, the foot of the cross, that pain just keeps moving on generationally and has this yes, this widening effect in the world.

And, and at the time we, we didn't, we didn't yet know Jesus as, not just as a savior in a cerebral way, but as a literal savior who saves us in the midst of the pain and the trauma. Oh, so Amy was killed when I was four. By the time I was seven, I was hospitalized for ulcers.

My teen years I was cutting. [00:15:00] By the time I got to university, I was having full-blown panic attacks. and, in and outta psych wards, just trying to work on what do you do with what you've seen. So really my first book, 1000 Gifts, is about somebody... I was dared to write down a hundred things that I loved, and I realized, well, if someone's gonna dare me, Vaneetha, I'm gonna do a thousand.

And as I wrote down, a hundred things I loved, I realized, oh, I'm doing a thousand. The more I kept doing, I kept realizing a thousand things I love is actually I'm writing down a thousand ways God loves me. And realizing that, in a world that is broken, in a world where I struggled with fear, if your first memory is someone you love being killed in a horrific way in front of you, the world does feel like anything could happen at any moment in time.

You realize I can count on Him. Count all the ways He loves you and realize, oh, I can count on God to be [00:16:00] Jehovah Jirah. To be the one who keeps providing good for me in the midst. There's manna in every moment. His grace will be sufficient. So, really the practice of gratitude. You can't simultaneously feel fear and gratitude at the same time.

So for me, learning how to go ahead and comfort and calm. The part of me that was afraid of what could happen at any moment in time. That part of me started to calm when that, that part of me where I'm giving thanks to the Lord, that part began to grow, and that part became a habit of who I actually really was.

I was practicing my faith, practicing giving thanks. Going, look at, when you practice giving th it's really what the Israelites do and also the Old Testament is they recollect all, look at all what God has done for us. Look what God has done. Remember, remember, remember. And when we remember what God has done for us.

In that act of giving thanks and remembering the broken [00:17:00] parts of us are re-membered and put back together again. And that's where I started to find wholeness, Vaneetha. It was in that, the practice of my faith really was about the practice of of giving thanks. Which is saying, Lord, what you've given me is a gift.

I may not understand it as a gift right now, but if I don't count all things as a gift, I have somehow miscounted the gifts because God will take the hard things and he will redeem it and make it into good in his own time and way.

**Vaneetha:** That's beautiful. I I, I have seen you do that so beautifully in your life, and with all of this hard, I'm guessing there's people listening who are in the midst of the hard, and especially with probably just such a painful childhood. It's just hard to move past that sometimes. And I'm guessing with all of that happened with your mom, being in and out of hospitals, there must have [00:18:00] felt a lot of shame and just trying to hide and pull away.

What would you say is somebody who's sort of in the midst of that right now that's listening?

**Ann Voskamp:** Oh, first of all, first of all, I think when someone's in lots of pain, when pain is deep, word should be few. So I think we, it's what God says, He's Emmanuel, the God who's with us. If that person... fewer words, but reaching over and squeezing their hand and saying, you are not alone.

And I think the most important thing, you said it Vaneetha, there is no shame. There is no shame. I remember I was a teenager, I write about it in *Broken Way*. I was a teenager and, A well-meaning pastor on a Sunday morning. he talked about how he needed, they needed to go ahead and sell the house that they were in because [00:19:00] it was, they lived right across the street from the loony bin.

And I thought, oh. And the congregation all laughed, which I understand. But as someone who, as a child, went to visit my mother in a, in a locked psychiatric ward every weekend. As a nine year old who cried herself to sleep 'cause she wanted her mama to come home. But mom was in so much pain from what she had seen. I think we as a church, we need to have deep...

if someone, someone has cancer or someone has broken a bone or someone had some, anything that we can see in our bodies, the church has come to come alongside those who are broken and be the hands and feet of Jesus. Yet, for some reason, [00:20:00] when we have, mental health issues, which are, which are rooted so much in trauma or this as being a deeply broken world.

And so much of what has happened happens to children who it wasn't in and of their, they did not do anything. They were in stories and times and places that they now, they now carry those wounds and scars that they are trying to work through. So how do we as a Church, we should be the safest place for the broken.

We should be the, the place where there is now no condemnation in Christ. There is now no shame that we become a, a refuge for those that are, that are hurting. And I think, I think it's really important for us as, as believers, I write about it in, in *The Broken Way*. I wrote, when the Church isn't for the suffering and the broken, then the [00:21:00] Church isn't for Christ because Jesus, with His pierced side, is always on the side of the broken.

Jesus always moves into places, moved with grief. Jesus always seeks out where suffering is. And that's where Jesus stays. The wound in His side proves that

Jesus is always on the side of the suffering, the wounded, the busted, the broken. The body of Christ should not offer you some cliches, but something to cling to right here in our own scarred hands.

His body doesn't offer some platitudes, but some place for your pain. Right here in our own offered time and space for you. His body doesn't offer some excuses, but we'll be an example right here in our bending down and washing of wounds. And we are His and He is ours. So we are each other's and we will not turn away from those who are broken.[00:22:00]

So I just think, um, for the person in a story right now, where... and all of us, I mean all of our families, mental health is an issue because this is a world that is toxic with sin. There is going to be struggles and pain. And the Church needs to be the safest place to come and talk about that trauma and take it to the foot of the cross.

**Vaneetha:** Yes. I think that is such an important message, Ann, because I think so many people with mental health trauma feel like the church is a place of judgment, and I completely agree. The church needs to be the safest place because we are to be the hands and feet of Christ.

**Ann Voskamp:** Yes, and I think, I think there's so much possibility of hope when we, we become that. Actually, Vaneetha, last summer I took, an intensive from the Trauma [00:23:00] Healing Institute, which is, an arm of the American Bible Society that, they realized in certain places in the world where they were the American Bible Society, was bringing scripture, people were in such traumatized pain, they couldn't even really understand what God was saying.

And they realized before we even get to scripture, we need to sit with your trauma. So this, this course was, was, devised by, it's Dr. Diane Langberg had really unpacked this trauma course and really teaching it to lay people.

Really, and honestly, Vaneetha, sitting doing that intensive, because I really wanted to be part of how can the Church be the hands and feet of Jesus to people in pain? And really it's about, it's about lay people getting trained to really be sensitive listeners. To really offer with-ness and witness that, that listens in a way that people feel heard and seen. [00:24:00] That comes alongside people and, not so much to go ahead and solve the problem because so many of these things, only the Holy Spirit can actually do the healing. Only the blood of Christ can cover those wounds. But what we... He makes us a body that can come alongside somebody who is so wounded to be dressing those wounds. And we do that by actually, service How do we go ahead and I



will, I will lean into those broken places and give you my time and give you my hospitality and I will be a listening ear.

So I think so much of the answer to pain and suffering in the world, Vaneetha, is how do we as the Church lean into that pain and suffering? Not to be afraid of broken things, not to turn and go the other way, but actually be like Jesus drawn to the broken. To sit with them in the ashes. To not be Job's friends, but to actually... I will be with you.

And I will, I will [00:25:00] pray for you and with you, and I actually will just take my hands and cup your tears and trust that God is gonna grow a good thing in this place.

**Vaneetha:** Hmm. Yes. I I love what you said about the fact that we can't just sort of throw scripture at people who are in deep trauma. And I think we certainly, we both love scripture and that is what heals us. But yet, if we are not sitting with people in their pain, some they just can't. Open the Bible and find truth.

They need to sort of feel loved and heard, and then God's truth pours over them. And I think people often wanna just, you know, you mentioned cliches and platitudes. People wanna sort of throw those out. And I think we do need to sit with people and

**Ann Voskamp:** I think, I think Vaneetha, we throw out the cliches and the platitudes because we're so afraid. Of the broken thing that God isn't going to fix this. So we have to rush in and try, [00:26:00] try to quickly fix this, thinking we are PR for God. And also to go ahead. Sometimes we think we're trying to help the other person, but it kind of is a way to ameliorate and ease our own, anxiety about this situation as opposed to, "Can I come and sit with you in the pain without and be a completely non-anxious presence? Because I am trusting that God in His time and his way is very present right here and is working all things together for good." So I think I don't, I know, Vaneetha, in your own story of pain and suffering, what that looked like. In our pain and suffering sometimes I just needed someone, I called it the ministry of Meatloaf. I needed someone to come and bring a meal. And that food was such comfort so that I [00:27:00] could sleep. I had someone who just, they left verses from hymns in my mailbox. Oh, that was a gentle way. It was like to sing to my soul and to remind myself of the truth of scripture.

I think, God's word is ultimately where we find healing, but He's also the same God who told Elijah. You need to sleep. You need to eat. He's a God who, who

knows that the trauma is in our bodies. So our bodies need somebody to feed us, someone to tuck us in, someone to sing to us, somebody to hold our hand and to, I really believe that shared tears are multiplied healing.

So does some, can someone just sit with us and not, not try to fix our tears, but just be a space to hold our tears.

Be like Emmanuel, the God [00:28:00] who is with us. And in that there is so much healing and it allows the Holy Spirit to speak to us. He will be the one that will speak the most healing words.

**Vaneetha:** yes. You know, it reminds me of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He wanted His presence. He just wanted them to sit with him. He wasn't looking for anything from them. They couldn't give Him anything.

**Ann Voskamp:** So good, Vaneetha.

**Vaneetha:** But God wanted presence and that should speak so loudly to us

**Ann Voskamp:** good, vaneetha. And Vaneetha, why?

Why don't we offer presence to people in suffering? Is it because, is it because we're so afraid of, I think sometimes there's a sense of. It's so painful to concede, but the, their suffering somehow is contagious. If I get too close to their suffering and brokenness, maybe, maybe something bad like that could happen to me.

I think, I think fear

that, this [00:29:00] could be my story. Fear that we can't fix it. I also think that, I think sometimes we're, we're not moving at the pace of grace. We're hustling so hard for certain goals and accomplishments in our own lives that we don't have time to go at the speed of God. To go at the speed of the Wounded Healer.

Like that good Samaritan who crosses the road and who's with the, the one in the ditch. We need, in A Waymaker, I unpack a, a way of life. A rhythm and a rule of life. And, it with the acronym, SACRED: Stillness, Attentiveness, Cruciform, Revelation, Examine and Doxology. But the C of SACRED: Cruciform. How am I going to, every day I sit with the sacred. When I get to the C, when I write it down, Lord, who are you asking me to, to live cruciform to?

[00:30:00] Cruciform really is looking, how am I formed and shaped like a cross? So yes, there are things I need to surrender to the Lord and let go of. That's part of being cruciform. But also being part of cruciform is if I'm gonna be formed and shaped like a cross with my arms, outstretched, Lord, how am I reaching out to you today?

And also, who is the person in pain and in suffering. That I am reaching out to today in embracing, do I have a rhythm of life and a way of life that slows me down enough so that I can sit every morning in a posture of intentionality. That I'm thinking about Who is someone in pain in my life that you Holy Spirit, are bringing to mind, that I can reach out and be the hands of Jesus, the heart of Jesus, the with-ness of Jesus to.

Because a person in suffering, the question always is like, where are you God?

My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me? Why have you [00:31:00] abandoned me? But He calls us to be like little Christs. C.S. Lewis says, He calls us to be the body that comes to sit with those who are, whose souls and, and bodies literally are wounded.

So what does it look like? Do you have a way of life that slows you down enough to keep cadence with Christ? Walk at the pace of grace and live cruciform, reaching out to somebody in pain.

**Vaneetha:** Mm. I would love if everybody listening to this would, would ask God who, who in their lives God is calling them to serve and to sit with and to listen to. Because I love that idea. We are all called to live cruciform, and yet we all get so busy with our lives that we think, oh, we say, oh, I'll pray for you and we should be praying for them.

But to actually reach out and give them the gift of [00:32:00] presence or meatloaf for, or doxology or hymns in your,

**Ann Voskamp:** It's so, it's so true, Vaneetha.

Early this spring, I was at, I spoke at a conference the day before. Then on Sunday morning, I was at the joy of, being in fellowship with them as a church community. And the pastor had shared they had, their second child was born with a myriad of health challenges and was told in utero the child's life was not compatible with life.

And they chose to go ahead and trust the ways of the Lord and this child now. His child now was two years old, but with so many health issues. And they actually had to, he was back visiting the church, but he had had to, he had had to surrender the, um, the pastorate, to actually move three hours to be in a city, close to a [00:33:00] major hospital because the child needs so much care.

And he was just really saying, it was so convicting for me. He said, you know, we got texts or comments or people would say, “praying for you,” and he said what was far more powerful for them was somebody who actually wrote out the prayer. Texted and messaged the prayer because then he said “I could read the words and I was also then praying with them,” and it was just really convicting for me.

Vaneetha, the people who are in pain and suffering, am I gonna just say, “praying for you” and slap that on there? And then sometimes that is we are moving and that's it. I'm praying for you. Yes, but can we, can we create spaces in our lives that slow down ? I'm actually going to write out, I'm gonna stop right now and pause, and I'm going to, to text the prayer to them because they are in the valley of the shadow of death and deep suffering.

And our prayers when we [00:34:00] type them out to each other and text them and message them, we are, that prayer not only goes before the throne of God. He was there to give us mercy and grace in our time of need. But that prayer also is preaching gospel back to the person in the midst of the shadow of valley of death.

So I just, it was really convicting to me to go, I am going to do this differently moving forward. Because sometimes I, you can't go ahead and deliver a meal. You can't get to someone's front porch. You can't sit there and hold their hand, someone you're desperate to. But I can go ahead and text out a complete prayer.

I can include the Scripture that they can root their day in. And not be Job's friend, but that I've actually taken the time to pray and I'm praying the truth of scripture back to the Lord and calling on the Lord to hear our cry and to fulfill His promises. So it was just really convicting to me.

I, I wanted to do that differently moving forward, Vaneetha.

**Vaneetha:** Oh, what a great example for all of us to remember. And I remember I actually have [00:35:00] a friend whose daughter has a hypoplastic left heart, which I would, yeah, love to talk about that with you in a minute. but our son had a hypoplastic left heart and she was in the hospital, and I just started, in my

quiet time, I would take a picture of something I was reading and sort of the notes.

So even without having the time necessarily to even type out the scripture, I just took a picture and I said, praying this for you, and just wrote some things in the margin in a pencil and took a picture and she said, I couldn't read scripture, like I was so exhausted. Like I was hanging onto that. That was God's word for me, and it was such a, I don't wanna say easy, but it wasn't this hour long thing and I realized it was so much more life giving, as you said, than, Hey, I'm praying for you because we just say that glibly.

**Ann Voskamp:** That's so powerful, Vaneetha, because it's not even just texting it out, but actually [00:36:00] seeing it in a Bible, like on a page right there, that, that's so powerful to somebody. That, that's like God slipping you a love note right directly to you. And you're right as you're doing your own scripture reading, you're, it's not anything you're adding extra to your life.

You're already actually doing it. You're actually making the note to yourself and like it's already right there. That's manna. How dare I hoard it to myself? Could I not pass that bread on to somebody who's starving? That is I pray. Lord, I won't forget that. Thank you, Vaneetha.

**Vaneetha:** Oh yeah. I mean, it just reminds me of what you said about living cruciform. As we open our Bibles in the morning and say, okay, Lord, how are you gonna use me? Just, and as we're talking, thinking, maybe I wanna pray, who do I need to send pieces of what I'm, what you're giving me today.

**Ann Voskamp:** yes,

**Vaneetha:** for those of us who love scripture, God is feeding us every day with something and can we feed someone else with

**Ann Voskamp:** yes. And I think, that [00:37:00] way of life's sacred. C is Cruciform. The R is revelation that if we want God to make a way through our lives, we need a fresh revelation from his word every day. And, and you're right, Vaneetha, when you're in the deepest, sometimes it's incomprehensible, unfathomable suffering and pain and deep trauma.

You can't see a way through not just how to get through this situation or how to get through today. You can't even, the pain is so deep. I don't even see a way to open up my scripture. But if someone else who's got a fresh revelation of God

today, can just pass that bit of light, like a torch into your hand and give you a revelation of just, just right here.

I don't have a whole page of scripture. I have to wade through. I don't have to, but where do I even start reading? Just this verse right here, might be a, an ember that could be... but the Holy Spirit can move it into [00:38:00] flame that you can see your way through. Just for this moment, this hour, this part of the day.

I just think that's, If we want a way through, sometimes when the Lord gives us a fresh revelation of Himself, maybe that revelation could also be light for someone else in the shadow of the valley of death.

**Vaneetha:** Yes. Yes, because we both know when you're in the midst of pain, when you're in the hospital crying out, it is just hard to pick up the Bible. There's so many pages, and even though you love them all, you're, you may love them all. They just feel daunting.

**Ann Voskamp:** They do feel daunting. They do feel daunting. And we had right after, Oh, that's another part of the story. But my, um, in 2021, my father was killed in the same farm yard as my sister. Also struck down and crushed and killed under the wheels of a vehicle. And oh, Vaneetha, I could hardly. [00:39:00] I struggled so much with, oh Lord, once.

Why twice? Like I, and the pain was, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat. But we had one friend, she would bring a meal and she brought Isaiah 41, verse 3. And then someone else, we kept running into Isaiah 41, verse 3, over and over and over again. When someone just passes a verse off with a meal, when someone takes a verse in the bottom of a card, it can be the Lord whispering something to you over and over and over again.

So is there, is there somebody who just... You're right, Vaneetha, when the tragedy is a pain, the suffering is so deep, you actually need someone to come along with that little candle that's a revelation of the Lord and say, just for this moment, No, that this is the heart and character of [00:40:00] God in the midst of the dark.

**Vaneetha:** So the pain of, of your dad as well as your sister. How are you even processing that now? Like the, the same kind of pain, just that your mom, even though I know your parents are divorced or were divorced, just the pain of that second thing.

I think you just think hard things don't happen twice. I think none of us

**Ann Voskamp:** it You do think, I think that,

I mean, I'm sitting with a woman. You've had pain, upon pain, upon pain. I think there's part of us. Mm. That's not true. I think it's a hissing lie from the pit, the enemy himself that tells us, oh, if there's only so much suffering that's rationed out to people and then after that everything [00:41:00] should be good or, or he, the enemy hisses at your ear, oh this, it's a lie of a transactional relationship with God.

If I've done all of this, God, you owe me this back. That's a lie from the pit of hell because our God is a good, Abba father. Whose love, it's a Hesed love. An unwavering, a steadfast, unchanging love that is more than love that's an emotion. When we, it's used over 200 times in scripture. We see it. King James, translates it, or ESV: Love, love and kindness of God. Love and kindness. We don't really have an English word for that, but the word in Hebrew is Hesed.

And it's a love that is faithful, loyal. A love of allegiance, a love that [00:42:00] cannot fail. A love that is, is faithful and cannot be divided. That's the kind of love God has for us. When we believe that, when we know that, when we trust in that, when we abandon all else and abandon ourselves to the has said, loving and kindness of God.

Then, then we might not understand the why, but we don't say, Lord, what is my way out of this? We say, Lord, what way do you want me to be through this? What way are you shaping and forming me to become in the midst of this? Because you trust that a Hesed loving, kind, God will not waste this.

So I really, I realize, I realize it [00:43:00] sounds trite, but it's not cliché. That when it's the hardest and the darkest and you are wondering how can this be happening again? That the dark and the coldness of the grief and the pain actually draws you deeper into the heat and warmth of His love. He becomes, I think it's Tim Keller who said when you've lost everything else, you realize that Christ is all you really need. And I think, I think Vaneetha in the midst of drama, pain, and suffering, you can realize, oh, I set my hope in the wrong thing. Because if you set your hope [00:44:00] in a marriage, set your hope in a relationship, set your hope in a dream, or a story, any of those things can crumble, fall apart, die, run off, leave you. But when you set your hope in Christ, the one who is with you, you never lose your hope. Your hope stays with you. So for me, I, I've had to realize there are times that, Vaneetha, I have, I confess to you, I have lost hope. But then that, that question right in Waymaker

over and over again, where have, where have you set your hope? Where is your hope? My hope isn't the wrong thing if I've lost it. It means I need to still be attentive to God, be cruciform, and reach out to Him. Find a fresh revelation from His word, examine my heart.

What am I afraid of here? [00:45:00] What do, what do I need to examine my own heart, that I put my hope in something else as opposed to Christ? Doxology, turn and give things and set all my hope in Jesus Christ alone. Actually, the, the day that my editors edited Waymaker was the same... I'd only handed the manuscript and maybe a week, week and a half before.

So the day they opened up the document to start editing on their end was the day my dad was killed. So when the edits came back to me on a book called Waymaker: Finding the Way to the life you've always dreamed of. Every single page at the top had April the 29th, 2021, the day Dad was killed. And it felt, Vaneetha, like it felt like evil himself was hissing and laughing.

Do you really [00:46:00] believe every page now? For weeks, every time I opened it, and I'd see the date right at the very top of the document, I think, oh, I can't do this. But as I waded into the, the manuscript,

I believed it even more than when I wrote it.

It was more precious and more real and more intimate. When you have experienced God in the valley of the shadow of death, nothing in all the world can convince you He isn't real. You've, you've known Him. You've seen him at 3:00 AM in the dark when you can't sleep and your teeth keep chattering because you're cold.

It's the heat of warmth and the closeness of [00:47:00] experiencing Christ with you that carries you through. So we don't need a way through. We need a way of life that keeps us in the way Himself.

Do I want a way out or do I want the way Himself? And, and I don't understand all the ways of this world. I don't. But I know that the Way makes a way to me and He will carry me through.

**Vaneetha:** I mean, when you said, you know, We don't wanna way through. We want, it made me think we want a way to him, and that's what suffering is, is sort of this invitation to a deeper life in Christ every time. But just as you said when you looked at that date, at first we're like, really? I don't [00:48:00] know



if like, if anybody's listening, it's not like the minute suffering lands on your doorstep.

You're like, I'm gonna open the package because it's gonna lead to a deeper life in Christ. You're like, get the package off my porch. I don't want it. This is not for me. And yet when we open it, sort of trembling hands. God meets us, but it's, it's a process. And so I loved hearing that. First the date felt like, wow, this is Satan.

And then realizing what, Satan means for evil, God means for good. And so that date is precious.

**Ann Voskamp:** it's actually, it felt like evil himself, using it as a weapon against me, and in the end, the Lord took that date back and used it to slay the enemy himself. That even if this happens, I know, that I know, that I know the goodness of the Lord.

In the [00:49:00] land of the living.

**Vaneetha:** Amen. Wow. Well, I have one last question for you.

This podcast is called Desperate for Hope, and so at the end of every podcast, I ask guests, what is one practical way you have found hope in the midst of despair, or when you felt most desperate for hope?

**Ann Voskamp:** I think I just return again, Vaneetha, to where we began. In a world where we, we set our hopes on things that we can't count on. When I started to count gifts, when I had a practice to, to literally pick up a pen. Can I count three things every day that I'm grateful for? Do I have a practice of doxology or dark?

I get to choose. When I have a practice of giving [00:50:00] thanks, counting the gifts, then I know who I can count on. Then I know who I can put my hope in. Then I know who will provide for me and fulfill. All of my hopes will be found in his provision and his grace. For me, the most practical thing you can do, Martin Luther says Satan hates the use of pens.

Evil doesn't want you, wants you to stay in the dark. Evil does not want you to see the grace and the goodness and the light of Christ here in the, the valley of the shadow of death. If you can pick up a pen, if you let something steal your joy, you let something steal your strength, pick up that pen and use it as a sword to fight for joy.

Use it as, as... take that pen and say, "Give thanks to Lord, His love endures forever." That is your weapon against the overwhelming army coming [00:51:00] against you. Can you write down, there's always something I heard today. There's always something, something, something to be grateful for. When you do that, you realize there are many things to be grateful for.

There will be more things than you can imagine, but at the time, that can be overwhelming. Start with just one thing. One thing. In the midst of this, can you start to go ahead and write those things down? Because when you write those things down, what you're saying is, my Jehovah Jirah will provide all of my needs. That sends Satan slinking back to his pit because my God is with me.

He's giving me witness and he's not just going to carry me through this. He is my way. I'm going to stay in Him, Himself, and He will be my promised land.

Full stop.

**Vaneetha:** Amen. Wow. God is with me and He will be my promised land.

**Ann Voskamp:** He, [00:52:00] his presence. His presence is the promised land. Whatever wilderness you think you're in, and it feels like a wilderness. It is a place that God goes ahead to woo us. Strip away the noise of everything else, that everything is barren, and I can hear him say, you are my beloved. And on that, I love you so much, Vaneetha. You truly, you truly, in so many ways, Vaneetha have been a modern-day Job that has been a signpost pointing to the Lord.

**Vaneetha:** Ann, I've learned so much about suffering from you, from your writing, from, from this, from your witness.

**Ann Voskamp:** It, it the grace and the kindness of the Lord that we're in a community of other people who can carry us to Jesus. When we can't move forward ourselves, pick up the corners of our mat and carry us to Jesus [00:53:00] in, in our suffering, we are not alone. We are together.

**Vaneetha:** We are. Thank you so much, Ann. I just so appreciate you.

**Ann Voskamp:** You are anointed, and I just thank the Lord for the gift You have been in my life.