

# HOPE BENEATH THE RUBBLE

Healing After Trauma

JENNIFER HAND

## Hope Beneath the Rubble: Healing After Trauma

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This book is dedicated to all the people  
around the world who've allowed me  
to stand alongside them on their holy  
ground of suffering, among the rubble,  
as we find hope together.



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## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This book will encourage you throughout its chapters to find a mental health professional who can help you walk through your healing journey as you process trauma. You don't have to take this journey alone.

I also strongly encourage you to meet with your medical doctor if you're struggling with depression or anxiety. They can be an excellent resource for you as you navigate processing and healing from the deep wounds trauma can cause.

If at any point you feel like you're a danger to yourself or others and you live in the U.S., please call 911 or call or text the National Suicide Hotline at 988. If you're outside of the U.S., please seek out your country's emergency hotline number.

The names and situations of clients in this book have been changed to protect each client's privacy.





# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Hope Beneath the Rubble*. I'm honored to have you here with me. This book has been years in the making, and I've written every sentence with a prayer on my heart for you.

When I received my master's degree in counseling (*two degrees in fact—what can I say, I love school, and frankly, I loved the social part of school!*) I had no idea the wild journey God would take me on.

I've been blessed to travel to over 50 countries and stand on the holy ground of suffering with people from all walks of life as I help them process their complex stories and their trauma. I also stand with them in their sufferings and hold onto hope for them.

In 2023, my sister's family and I traveled to the Dominican Republic to meet up with some friends who minister there. The work that Jamey and Elizabeth Davis and Jon Jon and Morgan Elicier are doing is amazing, and it was such a joy to witness their ministries. While there, I was asked to teach a trauma training to Haitian women living in the Dominican Republic.

I'd already seen firsthand the trauma many had experienced due to the violence and unrest in Haiti, so I was very honored to say yes to this request. As I taught about trauma and its effects, I wanted to have a resource to give them to take home. Something that would help them tangibly hold onto hope. That was the birth of the idea of writing this book. But can I be candid with you here? I didn't want to write this book. If you know anything about the Enneagram, I am an off-the-charts Enneagram 7, which means I want to have fun. I'm here for the party! Talking about feelings, trauma, and hard stuff—well, that's not fun. I am known for making readers laugh out loud with my writing.

I know what you're thinking. How did someone who just wants to have fun become a trauma counselor? That's a story for another time but trust me when I say, it's incredible where obedience to God will take you.

So, because of my love of laughter, a version of me feels the need to share a story with you about a time when I was in Turkey.

I'd been in the Middle East doing trauma care with refugees and had a layover at a Turkish airport. I was wearing a skirt that was a little too long but comfortable for the long days of traveling back home. Because I was in a hurry, I thought walking on the moving sidewalk would be a great and fast way to get through this massive airport.

It was a great idea until it wasn't.

I reached the end of the moving sidewalk, and my *slightly too-long* skirt got stuck. I walked off the end and kept moving forward, but my skirt did *not*. It got sucked into the moving sidewalk, and suddenly I was in the middle of this Middle Eastern airport in all my glory, unable to retrieve my skirt. I found myself laughing as I hurriedly looked for a bathroom to take cover in. (*It's ok, you can laugh too!*)

At that moment, I was vulnerable. Uncovered.

That's how it can feel when you talk about trauma. Vulnerable. Uncovered. All of the sudden, your breath is sucked out of you, and you wonder how you'll move forward without whatever was taken from you.

It's my prayer that this book helps you acknowledge the weight of what trauma has taken from you, while gently guiding and assisting you in moving forward after you've had time to take cover and heal.

## What You Can Expect in the Pages to Come

We'll dive deeper into the definition of trauma, but simply put, *you experience trauma when you feel deeply unsafe physically, emotionally, relationally or spiritually*. Trauma impacts us all, but there is hope for healing and I'm here to help you experience it.

At the end of each chapter, there are "Heart Work" sections to guide you through each baby step of healing. Here you'll have space to journal, interact, process the ways trauma has impacted you, and discover how you can continue to find hope in your new normal. Don't feel pressure to do it at a particular time or to answer every question. Skip what doesn't serve you—it's a space for your own journey of healing.

As you seek healing from traumatic events, I pray this book offers support and encouragement. Healing can be found for you, my friend.



## CHAPTER 1

# EARTHQUAKES AND COFFEE



Superman. He was known to be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. (*True confession: I had to Google which superhero was known for that.*) I've never scaled a tall building, but I do have a skill I didn't know I possessed until it happened one evening in Turkey.

I discovered I could hold a cup of coffee and a cookie in one hand while jumping over a wall as a 7.6 earthquake rocked the earth. Not one drop of coffee spilled as I leaped the wall to get outside our building while the ground moved. I took a sip of coffee to steady my heart as the ground rolled, and looked around, preparing myself for the worst.

We were in an area packed very close together with houses. I will never forget the sounds of that evening. The sound of the earth rumbling as it moved. The sound of the buildings shifting. Things falling. But mostly the sounds of terrified people all around me. The sounds of already traumatized people full of panic, who were now being retraumatized before my very eyes.

It was February 2023, and I was in Turkey ministering on the holy ground of suffering. Turkey and Syria had recently experienced an earthquake which resulted in tens of thousands of

deaths and complete devastation. Paired with my master's degree in counseling with an emphasis on trauma, my 'yes' to God has taken me around the world after natural disasters to provide trauma care in the aftermath of such crises.

I spent the week leading up to that second earthquake holding the hands and hearts of people who had lost so much. Many had lost family members. Most had lost their homes, workplaces, livelihoods, and sense of safety. I heard the horrific stories, smelled the lingering smell of death, and saw the buildings flattened to twisted concrete and glass rubble. And here I was, with these people, as they experienced the earth-shaking again.

At that moment, I wanted to be like Superman and leap tall buildings in a single bound. I wanted to be able to rescue people from their homes. I tried to hold their hearts until they felt safe again. Instead, I found myself leaping a wall, coffee in hand, realizing I was not Superman, but simply a woman watching the trauma of everything shaking around me.

## **When Everything Shakes**

I imagine you picked up this book because your Earth has experienced shaking at some point. Maybe you haven't experienced a physical earthquake, but you have experienced something, or years of something, that has made everything feel unsteady, leaving devastation in its path.

Maybe you want to be like Superman but can barely even hold on to your coffee.

I want you to know that you're welcome here. I'm honored to stand or sit or kneel or crawl into this sacred space with you. In this space, you can admit that you've been through something traumatic, and you may not be sure how to rebuild from the rubble.

Sometimes, trauma happens in a moment; sometimes, it compounds over a lifetime. It can be easy to explain away trauma when we believe our trauma wasn't as bad as what our neighbor Sally experienced. You may call what you're feeling survivor's guilt or want to resist using the word trauma:

I want to stand here with you and do what I would if I were in your home after a natural disaster. People often ask me what I do or say as I help people process life-changing things like hurricanes, floods, fires, earthquakes, violent acts, etc.

Here's what I tell people:

The most important thing to do is to be physically present. To stand with people amid all their belongings outside of their freshly gutted house after a flood. To go to the hospital room and hold hands with the person who has just heard devastating news. To grab a bag and start picking up debris from a tornado. To show up and then hold space for their story.

So that's what we're going to do here. Let's both show up and hold space for your story.

## **Raise Your Hand**

If I were speaking in a room full of people, what would your reaction be if I asked you to raise your hand if you had been through a trauma?

I imagine some hands would immediately go up because there is no doubt in your mind about your experience. Maybe you had a car accident, an assault, or a natural disaster. But perhaps you wonder if your relationship breakup or financial disaster counted? Maybe you would raise your hand because trauma seems to be trendy these days, and don't we all want to be trendy? Or perhaps you would be like me and think, how can I sneak out of the room and get a nice cup of strong coffee and avoid any trauma talk?

After the unexpected earthquake in Turkey, when I thought I was going to help in disaster relief, I came home forever changed. My literal and figurative earth had been shaken. I had not only seen and heard the worst stories in all my years of responding to natural disasters, but I'd also experienced the ground shaking myself.

When I got home, I realized I needed to take some space to heal, because the earth-shaking wasn't the only thing I needed to process.

During that time, I listened to *The Body Revelation: Physical and Spiritual Practices to Metabolize Pain, Banish Shame, and Connect to God with Your Whole Self* by Alisa Keeton. I heard her list some of the events in life that are considered trauma. (*As I am a trauma-trained therapist, I know these things for others, but it's too easy to forget for myself!*)

As I listened, I realized how many of these events had happened to me in the last year and a half of my own life. A car accident where I hydroplaned on an interstate, spun several times, hit someone head-on, and could have died—check. War—going to do trauma care in Ukraine when active missile attacks happened—check. Natural disasters—earthquake and tornado—check. And we can all add a collective going through a global pandemic trauma—check!

I realized I needed help processing these traumas, and I'm wondering if you might need help, too. I highly encourage you to find a trained counselor in your area. Ask your friends, pastor, and Google for recommendations. Reach out for help as you begin to process your trauma.

If you would raise your hand and say, "Wait, maybe I have been through some stuff!" I want to come up and stand beside you and remind you that you're not alone.



## Biting Flies and Jellyfish

I recently was on a girls' trip to the beach. We were so excited to dig our toes in the sand. My friend purchased one of those fancy new beach tents that's more like a giant kite. I will say that I'm not the girl to figure out how to put these types of things together because it will end up a disaster.

We worked so hard to get our poles anchored in the sand. *(And by we, I just tried to do what they told me to do and often did it wrong!)* Things seemed to work until the wind shifted, and we no longer lazily sat under the tent in the sun. We were buried by the tent, unable to see the sun.

We got the tent set back up and were ready for round 2 when the plague of biting flies started. They were everywhere. And they weren't just flying around, annoying us; they were biting us. We quickly ran to the beautiful ocean water to escape them. Surely, if we jumped into the clear blue water and submerged ourselves, the flies couldn't find us there.

But guess what did find us? The Jellyfish. Apparently, there was a jellyfish plague happening as well. I have never seen so many jellyfish. They were everywhere, their tentacles ready to sting at any moment. We were now trying to avoid the stinging flies AND jellyfish.

Are you anxious reading this yet?

I relate this scenario for you because the effects of trauma can be like these jellyfish and biting flies.

You're trying to enjoy life, but the effects of your trauma just seem to keep coming at you. You may find yourself more anxious, unable to sleep at night. You may find yourself irritable. You may have intrusive flashbacks.

So, you try to outrun the effects of your trauma just like we ran to the ocean, but you realize there are other ways the lingering trauma is creating potential harm and disruption

to you. It would be nice to ignore it, but that doesn't make it disappear.

I'm so excited to offer a gentle invitation to you for the steps to begin lessening the ways trauma impacts your daily life. It will always be part of you, but it doesn't always have to paralyze you. One day, there will be fewer jellyfish and flies, but only if you start facing your trauma now.

## **What about God?**

Talking about trauma can bring up some big questions in our hearts about life. How can a good God allow bad things to happen? Where is God in these dark nights of the soul? Why didn't He stop me from having to experience \_\_\_\_\_?

As a trauma counselor, I've stood with, sat with, held hands with, and caught the tears of those who may be asking some of those heavy questions. I've held those questions in my own heart as I watched someone I loved suffer. And I've held those same questions, and many more, in my own heart, about my own suffering.

My least favorite class in graduate school was theodicy (theology) of trauma. It was a weekend-intensive class, and the only way I made it through was by thinking about ending each day with chips and salsa with friends. The class was full of heavy stuff to talk through and process. We spent more time in the book of Job than I ever wanted to.

This book won't be an intensive on the theology of trauma. Many people with more degrees and more smarts than me have written books for you on that. But I cannot write about hope beneath the rubble without incorporating the ultimate hope I've found: Jesus. I will never forget the first time I worked as a trauma counselor after a natural disaster.

For years, I'd served as a missionary in Nepal. I loved the people. I adored the culture, the language, the food, all the things. I lived there, made my home there, and left pieces of my heart there when I left.

Now I was stateside again. I was staying with a friend as she was grieving the death of her mom when I saw a news story that took my breath away and brought me to my knees.

A 7.8 earthquake had rocked Nepal. When I lived there, they consistently predicted the "big one." We had earthquake drills. We had an earthquake preparation box. But nothing can prepare you for when the earth shakes and everything changes.

The news showed pictures of the places that I loved—the people I loved—buried under rubble. I knew I had to get there. My freshly earned master's degree in counseling, my ability to speak Nepalese, and my love for the people led me to buy a plane ticket straight to Nepal.

After a long journey, I arrived in the village nearest the earthquake's epicenter. The villagers were gathered outside, clinging to each other along the side of a mountain in the middle of an aftershock. They were waiting for me as they heard I'd come to bring them hope. But this was my first encounter with such destruction, and I had no idea what hope I had to offer.

Church buildings are rare in Nepal, but there happened to be one in this village. They'd been having a service there when the earthquake occurred. Many were trapped inside the building, which was now a pile of rubble. I knelt beside the rubble, and something caught my attention.

There's always  
hope beneath  
any rubble. It's  
the hope of  
the cross.



It was the cross that had been on top of the church. It was broken and buried among the rubble, but you could still tell what it was. I sensed the Lord speaking to my heart, reminding me there's always hope beneath any rubble. It's the hope of the cross.

While the weight of questions you may have about God and your circumstances may be heavy right now, I want to encourage you with the hope of Jesus.

This isn't a place where I'm going to slap your heart with Romans 8:28 and tell you God is working all things for His glory and according to His purposes. I remember when my dad was in the hospital for thirty-one days fighting a battle with a rare leukemia, and people were telling me that verse over and over. I knew it but didn't want to hear it then. I just needed people to show up, bring a snack or barbeque sandwich, and let me know they were with me.

This book comes with an imaginary barbeque sandwich, chips, and a side of hope for you that Jesus is with you. However, please know you're welcome here regardless of where you are in your relationship with God.

**Heart Work: When the Ground Shakes  
(and You Spill No Coffee)**



Welcome to the part where we get intentional. We’re not leaping over walls (*though, props to you if you are*)—we’re taking one brave step toward healing. No superhero cape required.

Take a breath. Grab your favorite drink. And let’s do a little *Heart Work*.

*PS: If you aren’t a word person, feel free to take some of these prompts to create a piece of artwork, a collage, or use whatever creative outlet works for YOU. Maybe you’re a verbal processor and need to discuss this heart work with a friend instead. Feel free to be YOU!*

**1. Spill-Proof Strength**

**PROMPT:** Recall a moment when “the ground shook” in your life—not literally, but emotionally, spiritually, or circumstantially. Write it out. Where were you? What happened? What did it shake in you?

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**BONUS:** Did you have a metaphorical “coffee and cookie” in hand—something you were trying to hold together while the world rocked?

## 2. The Soundtrack of Survival

**PROMPT:** In the story of your trauma, what are the sounds you remember—physical or emotional? (Sometimes the loudest “sounds” are silent: shame, confusion, exhaustion.)

Write a short paragraph (or list) of what you “heard” that season.

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## 3. Raise Your Hand

**REFLECTION:** Imagine I’m in the room with you, passing out metaphorical coffee and barbeque sandwiches. If I asked, “Have you been through trauma?”—what would your body instinctively do?

Circle one:

-  Hand up in the air waving for help.
-  Half-raise, unsure.
-  Hands down, but my heart is yelling “YES.”
-  I’m sneaking toward the door to avoid this question entirely.

Now ask yourself: *Why did I choose that response?* Let your honest answer surface, without judgment.

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#### 4. Vulnerable + Uncovered = Courageous

**PROMPT:** Write about a time you felt “skirt-less in the airport” or vulnerable. It might not be funny yet, but was there a moment you felt suddenly uncovered, seen, or exposed?

Then gently ask: What did that moment reveal about what I needed? What did I fear? What did I believe?

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#### 5. Hope in the Rubble

**REFLECTION + VISUALIZATION:** Close your eyes briefly (*after you read this part, of course*). Picture a place in your life that feels buried. Rubble everywhere. Messy. Confusing. Then imagine the cross—maybe cracked, dusty, but unmistakably there—right in the middle of it.

Now open your eyes and write this sentence:

“Hope beneath my rubble looks like \_\_\_\_\_.”  
Write what hope looks like to you even if it feels unsure, shaky, or unfinished.

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## 6. Speak This Over Yourself

Say this out loud. Yes, out loud. (If you're in public, whisper it into your coffee cup.)



"My story matters, even if I don't know how to tell it yet.  
My pain is real, even if someone else had it 'worse.'  
My healing is possible, even if I can't see it yet.  
And I don't have to do it alone."



That's enough brave for today. You did it. You showed up.

Take a deep breath. Maybe grab a snack. (*Preferably one without jellyfish or biting flies.*)

Next chapter? Let's keep showing up together.



## CHAPTER 2

# A NEW NORMAL AFTER THE STORMS



Raise your hand if you remember what a wild year 2020 was.

Do you find yourself having a physical reaction even just thinking about it? Recently, my sister and I were reminiscing about how excited we were when we were able to find our mom's favorite kind of toilet paper for her birthday gift. We had to climb two shelves to reach it because it was hidden at the very top. *(If you're wondering, we grew up with the fancy name-brand toilet paper with lotion. Now that I'm a grown-up and buy my toilet paper on my budget, I buy the one-ply, barely-there stuff for myself.)*

On Easter Sunday evening of 2020, my small group and I played a game on Zoom. It had been the strangest Easter Sunday I could remember. Church had been online. We weren't sure it would be safe to be with my parents, so we met them outside and didn't even hug them *(and we're a big-time hugging family)!* We even sanitized the grocery bags in which we brought the Easter eggs.

That night, while we were hanging out together via Zoom, our phones alerted us there was a storm warning for that evening. We didn't think much about it, continuing to laugh and chat. We





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jennifer Hand**, Executive Director of Coming Alive Ministries, and author of *My Yes is on the Table: Moving From Fear to Faith* wishes she could sit down and have a strong cup of coffee with each of you and ask you, "What makes you come alive?"

Jennifer founded Coming Alive Ministries in 2012 and loves the honor of traveling nationally and internationally, providing the invitation to come alive in Christ through conferences, retreats, written resources, and counseling.

Jennifer has had the joy of serving in over 50 countries and speaking at around 40 events a year. With her master's degree in trauma counseling, God has opened a unique door for Jennifer to respond after natural disasters around the world, providing trauma counseling and the hope of Christ on the holy ground of suffering.

Jennifer would love to keep up with you in her cozy internet corner of the world at [www.jenniferhand.org](http://www.jenniferhand.org) or on social media @comingalivejenn or Jennifer Hand on Facebook.

