

New York Times best-selling author of *KISSES FROM KATIE*
KATIE DAVIS MAJORS

Foreword by ANN VOSKAMP



New York Times Bestseller

DARING *to* HOPE

Finding God's Goodness in the Broken and the Beautiful



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MULTNOMAH

DARING TO HOPE

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Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-7352-9060-0

Hardcover ISBN 978-0-7352-9051-8

eBook ISBN 978-0-7352-9054-9

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Cover design by Kristopher K. Orr; cover photograph by Mackenzie Dalton; insert photos courtesy of Katie Davis Majors and the Amazima Ministries photo archive

Published in association with Yates & Yates, www.yates2.com.

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Published in the United States by Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

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The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:

Names: Davis Majors, Katie, author.

Title: Daring to hope: finding God's goodness in the broken and the beautiful / Katie Davis Majors.

Description: First Edition. | Colorado Springs : Multnomah, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017017869 | ISBN 9780735290518 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780735290549 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Davis Majors, Katie—Religion. | Orphans—Services for—Uganda. | Orphans—

Uganda—Social conditions. | Orphanages—Uganda. | Church work with orphans—Uganda.

Classification: LCC HV1347 .D383 2017 | DDC 276.761/083092 [B]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017017869>

Printed in the United States of America

2018—First Trade Paperback Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD BY ANN VOSKAMP

Daring to hope can explode into a liberation out of a prison you didn't even know you were in.

And sometimes?

You don't know that there's already a slow burn of hope in your bones—until you meet someone ablaze with whispers of His glory.

Like when I meet Katie on the front porch of her house on red African dirt under a scorching July sun.

In five minutes, I am sitting crisscross applesauce on Katie's couch with her littlest girl, who has dragged up a pile of books, and I am reading *Ox-Cart Man* aloud in Uganda with this little wonder nestled on my lap, her head of braids tucked under my chin. I think my heart might explode.

Katie stirs beans in a massive pot on the stove, and one of the girls pulls up a chair and mashes a steaming heap of potatoes as I read to the littlest girl. There's a map of the world on the wall over Katie's table, and this is what I want to do from the moment I meet Katie.

We could write it on a million kitchen chalkboards: You are doing something great with your life—when you are doing all the small things with His great love. You are changing the world—when you are changing one person's world. You aren't missing your best life—when you aren't missing opportunities to love like Christ.

Love is complicated and the simplest thing in the world. And that is all there is.

And when you know the embrace of His love in a thousand ways, daring to hope becomes the way you breathe.

You aren't in the presence of Katie five minutes before realizing she

never stops testifying to love and hope and the richest kind of life. She's a woman who laughs loud and long, a bit like an angel, when someone says she's like a modern-day Mother Teresa.

Katie just took Jesus at His word: real life is lived on your knees—because hope is a daring seed that you plant with prayer again and again, because this is the way your life yields more joy.

A man with a flesh-eating virus limps to the door. Katie opens the door wide and grabs him a chair, and I watch her dress his wound. Katie's hope is a verb that reaches up, that reaches out, that has hands and heart. And her hope always rises.

We go out to the aching countryside, to where Amazima, the ministry she founded, feeds hundreds of kids. We sing Gospel songs till I think we might lift the roof. I lean in and push laughing kids on swings and watch how these kids in hard places touch the sky, watch how all your hopes can swing up to touch the expanse of God.

One of Katie's beautiful daughters celebrates her birthday, and Katie and I stand together in the kitchen and make up six pans of lasagna. It's like I can feel the sky descending to meet all this brazen believing. Katie will serve twenty-two people around her table tonight. She leans over my shoulder in the kitchen and whispers, "Pray? There's a friend named Benji coming tonight, and it's really new, but maybe God is calling us to something beyond friendship and maybe you can hope with us?" Katie smiles, radiant, and because of all her unceasing prayers and defiant praise, she has swallowed down bits of the glowing sun, bits of His undeniable glory.

When Katie lights the candles that night, you can feel the lighting: Living radical isn't about where you live; it's about how you love.

How you love the beauty of Him, how you love His beautiful people.

It's about realizing: Real life, large love, doesn't happen when you arrive in a certain place. It happens when *your heart* arrives in a certain

place. Wherever you are, right where you are, dirt-road Africa or side-street America.

When your heart decides to move into God, you are always given what you're really hoping for: more of God.

Daring to hope for big things isn't about having extraordinary faith; it's about being faithful in the small, ordinary things. It's about leaning into the next right thing and finding what you've always hoped for: His shoulder to lean on, His arms to carry all, His heart to be your home.

I look over at Katie smiling over the candles, Katie lit, and there it is: Radical living, radical loving, radical hoping, isn't as much about where you move but about a life of gazing into the face of Jesus—and letting Him move you where you are.

He may move you somewhere across the world. Or he may move you to believe again, to dare again, to reach out again. But if the steadying love of Christ moves you, it will move you out into the world with the bravest hope. He will move you to hope for what seem like impossible things, because His closeness is your most cherished thing.

Too often we want clarity and God wants us to come closer. Dreams are always clear when you press closer and see them through the sheer love of God. Every single page you hold in your hands is sheer transparency. Both Katie's heart and God closeness will steal the breath right out of your lungs, and you'll find yourself the freest forever prisoner of the greatest hope.

After the birthday party, Benji lights a campfire in the backyard, and Katie's thirteen daughters find sticks, and Benji helps Katie's girls roast a mountain of marshmallows. You can see it in her eyes, how Katie looks at him, at her daughters, how she's kindled with the heat of His other-worldly love.

Standing there that night under a starry Ugandan sky, Katie didn't know yet how the story you're holding would unfold. She didn't know

how she'd taste heartbreak, she didn't know how the road ahead of her would curve and turn and detour, she didn't know how she'd hold such glory—and behold Him and be held through everything.

But Katie turned to me and said, “The answer to everything is relationship.” And I nodded and could feel the healing warmth of it.

The answer to every question you have is always intimate relationship.

Intimate relationship with Him.

Relationship is the whole of reality. Katie lives this in the rarest, real-est, and most Jesus-revolutionary way. These pages testify to an intimate love affair with Jesus that births a hope that cannot disappoint. And you can always hold on to hope when you know Jesus is holding on to you.

For three ordinary extraordinary days, my oldest daughter and I did life with Katie, and an authentic amazing grace reigned. Hard-won peace pervaded, and at the close of every meal, Katie served her family Living Bread from His Word, just like she serves on every page of this book. And all I could think was: *You hope as well as you know your Father.* Katie hopes like she's memorized the face of her Father. This is a holy witnessing, and you're holding pages that testify in your hands.

You will never be the same.

When Benji stokes the fire one more time, embers fly and hope splits the sky and even the stars give glory.

—Ann Voskamp, author of the *New York Times* bestsellers
The Broken Way and *One Thousand Gifts*

DARING
to HOPE



AN INVITATION TO HOPE

MY KITCHEN IS PAINTED YELLOW. Because yellow is the color of sunshine and of joy and because yellow is my favorite.

It's never quite as clean as I want it to be in here. As I stand in the after-bedtime quiet, my eyes follow a trail of red-dirt footprints across this floor that is supposed to be white, and tears of gratitude begin to well. My mind fills with beloved memories, so many memories that are held here.

This kitchen, this is where I serve. Many days, this kitchen is where I live. The window above the sink looks out over the backyard, all the way to the garden, where the corn climbs high and children hide among sunflowers and sugarcane stalks. It looks out at the mango tree that my girls often hang from, all happy and limbs flailing as I pretend I am not worried that they will fall. I have a baker's dozen I call my own, little girls who are turning into young women more rapidly than I would like, each

one knit into our family by the impossibly beautiful, impossibly hard miracle of adoption.

I stand at this window, sometimes for what feels like the majority of the day, and wash dishes and rinse vegetables for dinner and sing worship. The back door is next to the sink, and children trail in and out, their endless questions and loud laughter and muddy footprints filling our home with joy. It sounds rather magical, doesn't it? It can be.

And sometimes it isn't. Children bicker and this mama loses her temper and the bread burns in the oven and things can unravel quite quickly.

These counters, nicked and crumb covered, the sink, one side piled high with drying dishes, they could tell some stories. They've seen my joy as I gaze out the window at my laughing brood and raise my soapy hands high in praise. They've seen tears fall in defeat over seemingly helpless situations as I peel a pile of potatoes and recite psalms to calm my heart. They've heard my tongue zing words of exasperation as another child yells playfully through the house and my whispered repentance later as I beg God to make me into the mother I long to be. These yellow walls have held late-night laughter with dear friends and early-morning remorse over broken dreams. They've witnessed confessions and achievements and the prayers of so many aching hearts, including mine.

This kitchen is where I returned in defeat the night I came home without the four-year-old foster daughter I had fought for. Sweet friends gathered around my daughters and me to make supper, and their silent labors meant more than words. I remember our first Thanksgiving prepared in this kitchen, my mom pulling the stuffing out of the oven, kids dancing happy, and people—oh so many people—spilling joy to fill this small space. Here we've played too-loud music and danced as we washed piles upon piles of dishes. Here I've set foster babies on counters next to casseroles for neighbors. Here in this same kitchen, I've stood exhausted

in the wee-morning hours to whisk high-calorie milk for people clinging to life, and I've cried out for Jesus to save them.

I stand here and let the memories flood my heart. In my mind's eye, I see little ones sitting on counters, watching me bake and eagerly waiting to stick their fingers into whatever it is I'm concocting. I hear the pitter-patter of little feet over the bubbling of the coffeepot and the excited voice of my littlest as she announces that the chicks have "popped" in the first light of the morning, and I feel the way God's mercy has washed over me in this place. I see hundreds of cooking lessons, little bodies crowded around a big pot, eager for their chance to measure, to pour, to stir. I see birthday cakes—*so* many birthday cakes—frosted and decorated with butterflies and flowers. I smell whole-wheat bread, warm and rising in this oven, daily, and I marvel at how He has been our daily bread.

I think of people, all the people who have filled this place over the years. Through the conversations and prayer and comfort of this kitchen, homeless mothers have found their ways to better lives, children have been healed and become whole, friends have found rest, and people I have loved have loved me right back. People have known the Lord in this place. *I have known the Lord in this place.*

I run my fingers over knife-worn counters, and time runs too fast. People are sent out from here. People heading home and people heading off to new futures. One day these girls, too, will head into their own futures. It's almost too much, this passing of time, the dying of dreams and the budding of new ones, this growing of babies into children and children into women and hearts to maturity. And I cry because I want to hold it all forever, the Lord's goodness in this place.

I have laughed here, I have wept here, I have created here, and *oh, I have prayed here.* And in this place, I have known Him more. I haven't always done it right, and some days I feel that I haven't been enough, but I know that He has. *He has.*

Directly above the oven are painted these words of Acts: “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. . . . And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”¹ This is my deep desire. I know it like I know my own breath: time passes, and these people will go, heading off to new places and new futures, and only He will remain. I serve meals in this kitchen, but I want to serve what really counts. *I want to offer all who pass through this place the Living Bread, the only food that truly fills.*

My eyes find the trail of footprints leading to the door, and through bated breath I ask it, beg it, “Lord, if I could have just one thing, could I serve them *You?*”



Ten years ago I moved across the ocean, from Tennessee to Uganda, full of something that I thought was hope but in reality was more like naive optimism. If you had asked me then how the Lord might most deepen my relationship with Him, I would have had all kinds of answers. At the old and wise age of nineteen, I thought I knew some things. I was going to give my life away for Jesus. I was going to change lives by teaching people the Gospel of Christ and helping provide for their basic needs. God was going to use me. I was going to be the answer.

I did not know the beauty that would find me in a life poured out for Him, the joy of calling little ones “daughter” and pressing into Him to learn what that really meant, the exhilaration of true and undefiled worship in a sea of people who did not speak the same language but worshipped the same God, the thrill of witnessing a life changed due to basic and simple provision of such things as medical care and nutritional assistance.

I did not know the pain that awaited me on the other side of the ocean, on the other side of humility, where I would recognize just how

little I had to offer. I did not know that a baby girl would call me “Mommy” for years and then I would have to give her up. I did not know that I would carry the responsibility of looking into a mother’s face and telling her that her child was not going to live. I did not know that I would forge deep friendships with people imprisoned by addiction I could not help them fight no matter how I tried. I did not know that I would provide care, for months at a time, for people living with HIV, desperately begging God to spare their lives, only to later find myself holding their hands as they slipped into eternity with Him on the other side.

And I did not know that in the middle of much pain and grief and loss, I would experience a joy and a peace that far surpassed human understanding. Reality would shatter my optimism, but I would realize that my positivity was only a cheap substitute for true hope anyway. The Lord would take the darkness and make it my secret place, the place where I knew Him more intimately and deeply than I had ever fathomed possible. In the middle of the hurricane that surrounded me, I would experience a true Comfort so deep, so clear, that it simply could not be denied. It was Jesus. *He was near.*

In our pain, He is near.

During sleepless nights and the death of friends and the breaking of families, Christ is all that remains constant and He is the only One who is sufficient. He holds my hands. He cups my face. He is near, and He whispers of a day when the pain is gone and I can fall on my face and worship Him forever.

Over the years, my packaged faith of all the right and wrong answers has been enveloped in a personal touch from the living God. My grief was His grief and my joy was His joy. In my darkness, I knew Him and He knew me. In the midst of pain I would not have chosen, He was real and undeniable and true. When life was not what I expected, where hope was not what I thought, He carved a space in my heart for Him.

This didn't make the pain easy. Some days, prayers seemed to go unanswered and loss overwhelmed our lives. I still lay prostrate on the bathroom floor and beat my hands against the hard tile and begged the Lord that I would not have to bury yet another friend. I still cried tears that threatened to take my breath away as I realized the depth of the suffering of the people around me, grief that would never end, not until Jesus comes back.

No, He didn't make the pain easy. But He made it beautiful. He held me close and whispered secrets to me and revealed things about Himself that I had not yet known. He scooped me into His big loving arms and held me in tenderness unlike any I had ever experienced.

I did not find all the answers to my questions. In fact, I might have more questions now than I did before. But I have found deep intimacy with the One who formed me and knows my heart. He has taught me His secrets in the darkness. He has taught me true and unwavering hope in Him.



Truly, this life is a far cry from the picture-perfect one I once imagined, with a few kids and a white picket fence. Our house isn't nearly as organized as I would like, and dinner is often late. We make a ruckus in the grocery store, and we don't get through all the schoolwork I intended for this week, ever. We are late to church and sometimes we get there and one doesn't have shoes and one forgot to comb her hair. We can be a bit of a mess, but we have a God who makes up for all we lack, a God who promises beauty for our ashes and streams in the desert and grace for today.

And I feel as though He has given me this promise: These days are sacred. God is good to us here and now, working all for our good, and He is daily peeling back the scales, opening my eyes to see. It's not what I once imagined; it's better.

Our house is always full, but it never really feels too small. Over the years we have made a habit, a lifestyle really, of opening the doors wide even when we feel like we can't possibly stretch any more, of making ourselves available to those God brings into our lives and seeing His goodness as we open our arms to Him and to others.

He always brings them. People flock here, for a glass of water, for a friendly smile, for a story of redemption, for a place to belong. He has filled our lives and our home with beautiful, broken people, and He has shown Himself to be God who mends the broken and uses the cracks to reveal His glory.

The stories I tell in these pages are not my own. They are the stories of many more faithful than I who have also known these things to be true. They are stories of those God has entrusted my heart with, and I pray my feeble words could honor them. They are stories full of truths that are not unique to me but are true for anyone who has known Jesus in the darkness and known even the dark season to be a gift.

It's a daunting task, to write it all down, to beg God for words that would truly point to only Him, to invite you in to see all of it, the good and the ugly, the joy and the pain, my heart bled out here on paper. But on the other side of this daunting task, on the other side of the risk of sharing my vulnerable heart with the whole crazy world, is the chance that you might see Jesus here, in our kitchen, here in our lives. And maybe you would see Jesus in our mess and in our brokenness and you would be encouraged that there is grace and purpose in your mess and brokenness as well.

And maybe you could read these words and know a real and true and enduring hope that can be found only in Jesus. A hope that met me in the places that I didn't expect, the places that I would not have chosen to walk through. A hope that was birthed amid pain and wreckage.

And so I invite you in to join us, dear one. Not because we have any

answers, but because I know the One who does. The kitchen isn't big, but we will make room. Come on in. For a glass of cold water, for a friendly smile, for a story of redemption, for a place to belong. My most daring prayer is that you would find the Lord here, in the pages of our stories and, more so, in the pages of your own. He has been my companion in the most devastating trials and greatest joys. His deepest desire is to be yours too.

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