

As I visited the Town, a privilege for which I am deeply grateful, I thought, *Wow! I never knew it took so many, many people to produce a film.* They were everywhere, busily looking after their given assignments. A wonderful team had been brought together to use their various talents to help us share the lives of ordinary people in ordinary circumstances but with extra-ordinary faith and endurance. Talents come in various sizes, shapes, and intensities. When they are all working toward the same goal, we have “magic.” Add the wonderful Hearties fans and you could have a small city. An exciting city. They can get rather boisterous in their enthusiasm. Bless them! They push the whole process forward.

And now, a Hope Valley devotional. One more way to add talent to talent—all to the glory of God. We may see ourselves on one or more pages. Thankfully, the authors do not just speak of the bumps, but lead us to explore the best way to deal with them. And we get to share some heart-warming victories too. Thank you, Brian and Michelle.

Though I treasure the entire Scriptures, there are cherished verses that I have carried for many years, not just in my head, but in my heart. They apply to each of us. One of them is Proverbs 3:5–6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths” (NKJV). Translated into my own words—needed because I am still working to practice them—I hear this: really and totally trust God who has proven over and over that He is more than adequate to handle every situation, and don’t even bother to try to muddle through situations in your own limited wisdom or ability. In everything, recognize and admit that He is God—all-knowing, all-powerful, loving, and gracious—and only He knows what is best for you, and He will lead you if you let go and put your unwavering faith in Him.

—Janette Oke

1

DREAM BIG ... EXPECT SURPRISES

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”

JEREMIAH 29:11



**“I can do this.
We can do whatever God calls us to do—
with His help.”**

—Elizabeth Thatcher

Elizabeth Thatcher beamed as she watched the passing beauty of the countryside out the window of her stage coach west. She had big dreams for her future. She couldn't wait to get to her new classroom in Coal Valley and to meet her new students. Elizabeth knew she would have to make some adjustments from her life of privilege back home in the big city, but she planned to face this adventure with courage and dignity.

Lost in her thoughts, she visualized the Coal Valley townspeople welcoming her with excitement, and the children waiting eagerly in their seats in the schoolhouse. The day couldn't get here soon enough.

But in that way that dreams sometimes unravel like yarn from a knitting needle, it didn't happen exactly like that. Elizabeth didn't envision a band of thieves waiting around the next bend for her. She didn't realize they would rob her of everything she had brought west. And instead of her triumphant entry into Coal Valley, she arrived limping, dirty, and bedraggled, hitching a ride in the back of a wagon. The thieves had stolen her dignity as well as her belongings.

Her welcome to Coal Valley wasn't what she'd imagined either. Instead of open arms and excitement, she was greeted with looks of skepticism and comments of derision. Coal Valley was no place for a princess. This was a hard luck town beset by tragedy—a coal mine accident that resulted in many of the children becoming fatherless, and a church fire that left the saloon as the only place to hold school.

And Elizabeth soon discovered that she wasn't prepared

for the primitive living conditions in Coal Valley. An outhouse and wood-burning stove in the little teacherage she was meant to live in would mean an uncomfortable new lifestyle. None of it was what she'd expected when she set out to fulfill the big dreams God had put on her heart.

It's that way for all of us, isn't it? Do you have a big dream for your life? A giant goal? A worthy aspiration? Perhaps even something you believe God is calling you to do? It's all very exciting as you begin the journey—but it's easy to forget that life can sometimes derail your dreams or delay your timelines.

As Elizabeth learned, people can discourage us and circumstances can temporarily defeat us, but God never wants us to give up on the dreams He has for us. There is no such thing as being uncalled. We don't get to un-ring that bell—even when the world puts thieves and outhouses in our path.

Persistence always beats resistance.



Prayer from the Heart

Father, I'm grateful for the big plans you've given me, but sometimes the waiting seems so hard. The bumps of life and hardships I face are discouraging. If I'm honest, there are days when I'm ready to quit ... to say that it's too hard ... to say that it isn't worth it. Remind me that even though I can't see what you're doing behind the scenes, you are in charge, you have my future in your hands, and you will equip me with everything I need to achieve what you have put in front of me. Thank you for entrusting me with this big dream. Help me to be faithful to your call.



What's on Your Heart Today?

- Why do you have trouble trusting God with the big plans He gives you?
- Why is it important to remain faithful, even when things become tough?
- How can you recognize if your big dreams are from God, or if they are just your own desires?

2

EVICITION NOTICES

Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

ECCLESIASTES 4:12



“You have every right to be afraid. We all do. But we mustn't lose hope. I believe that there's a reason for every fear we face and every hardship we suffer—and it's to make us all stronger people.”

—Elizabeth Thatcher

Times were difficult for the widows of Coal Valley. They were still grieving the loss of their husbands and sons in the coal mine accident. All the responsibilities of life now fell on their shoulders, and the load was heavy. But then another lace-up boot dropped.

The widows discovered “Notice to Quit Premises” nailed to the doors of their company houses. Abigail Stanton and the others understood the company needed to make room for new miners who could clear the mine and rebuild, but how were the women going to move their families in two weeks’ time, and where would they go? Coal Valley was their home.

With no time or money to hire a lawyer, Elizabeth Thatcher and her students searched for a legal way for the women to keep their homes, but their efforts fell short. Some of the widows wanted to give up and move on. Others wanted to fight to keep what they had. They loved their community and didn’t want to lose the only homes their children had ever known. But Abigail had another idea: What if the women went to work clearing the shafts themselves?

Mayor Henry Gowen, head of the mine company, laughed when the women showed up dressed and ready to dig out the mine. They were willing to face the risks on one condition: If they could clear the shafts in time, they would have the right to stay in their homes. Mayor Gowen decided to humor them and agreed to the plan, but he fully expected them to fail within a week. He would get some work out of these stubborn women ... and then still take their homes.

Can you imagine the fear and trepidation of going to work

in a collapsed coal mine? Can you picture facing the dangers of a methane gas leak, or breathing in that black dust, or banging your hands, knuckles, elbows, and knees on all those sharp rocks?

What is *your* collapsed coal mine? What eviction notices have been tacked up on your door? What situation right now feels so overwhelming that you don’t think you can get through it?

In times like these, we have a few choices. We can wallow in our hardships, and become worrywarts and victims of our circumstances. Or we can do what the widows of Coal Valley did. First, they kept their eyes on the prize. Failure was not an option. Second, they had to face their fears and get outside their comfort zones—that’s the only way impossible challenges become possible.

And third, they realized that they were much stronger if they labored together than they would be as individuals—because as the Scriptures tell us, a cord of many strands is an unbreakable force.



Prayer from the Heart

Father, why do I always try to fix my own problems? Why do I make a mess of things when I should just turn to you first? Please help me to trust you more in situations where I feel as if I'm trapped in a corner with no idea how to escape. Help me to get out of your way so that you can take charge. Teach me what you want me to learn from each situation, and provide the strength I need. Help me to also be vulnerable enough to ask my friends and loved ones for help. And, in turn, help me to be available when life has them in a bind. Thank you for never failing me.



What's on Your Heart Today?

- How can you help to lighten the burden for others as they go through difficult times?
- How can you be more transparent with God and others when you face hardships?
- How does it change everything when you realize that God's resources and abilities are limitless?

FROM GUILT TO GRACE

But you, LORD, are a compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

PSALM 86:15



“The light of love restores every lost voice.”

—Elizabeth Thatcher