



CHRONIC JOY® DEVOTIONAL

THE POWER OF SMALL FRESH HOPE IN CHRONIC PAIN

By Lee Ann Zanon

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. (Matthew 10:29)

The view from our back deck gives my husband and me a front-row seat to a miracle. We watch birds carry twigs to a nearby bush and weave them into a nest with no construction plans or tools in sight. They know just what to do and the exact time when it needs to be finished.

In the weeks that follow, we delight to hear tiny “peeps” alerting us to new life. We marvel to see Mama and Papa Bird guard the nest and also deliver an endless supply of food to their offspring. However, there’s an occasional sad turn in this story: a baby bird falls and doesn’t survive. If we weren’t observing carefully, we might not have noticed.

How incredible to realize our Heavenly Father keeps an even closer eye on every part of His creation! Scripture emphasizes His special attention to small aspects, including Jesus’ illustration of a sparrow falling to the ground. His parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:3-10) further reveal His heart for what the world deems small and inconsequential: one sheep, one coin, one person (like you and me).

BEGINNING MY CHRONIC PAIN JOURNEY

When I began my chronic pain journey more than three years ago, my world was filled with “big.” I had been a professor at a Christian university, teaching a full complement of courses. I taught large-group Bible studies and frequently spoke to gatherings of 100+ at women’s retreats.

My physical challenge came on quickly, with extreme jaw pain primarily triggered by speaking in group settings. It eventually expanded to my neck, causing deep muscle soreness and persistent headaches.

As a result, I lost realms of beloved service that had filled my life with purpose. I cried out to God countless times: “Why would You allow these struggles to rob me of what You gifted me to do? How can I serve You now, when I feel so limited?”

Over time, I sensed the Holy Spirit asking me to consider abilities I still had, including the capacity for quiet, one-on-one conversations. Not long afterward, I came across the phrase *the power of small*. It went straight to my heart, birthing fresh hope.

OFFERING WHAT I HAVE

Although I couldn’t engage with people as I had before, I could share the love of Christ with one person at a time. Whether face-to-face or through writing, I could still bring encouragement to others. Small connections could make a big difference. Most of all, my Heavenly Father would count them as precious.

The trials God allows to unfold in our lives are never meant to diminish our value or purpose. He desires to bring forth new treasures of faith and grace, gifts we can share (whether that’s noticed or not). The Lord asks us to simply offer what we have, trusting Him to use it for His glory and good plans.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I bring You what I have today. It feels so small, yet I know it's what You desire. Please show me how I can share the love and truth of Jesus despite my limitations. Thank You for helping me know Your will as I walk the path of chronic pain or illness. I love and worship You. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- How has chronic pain or illness limited your ability to serve God and others?
- How have those challenges impacted your sense of purpose or worth?
- How can you still live out your faith, even if it looks different than in the past?