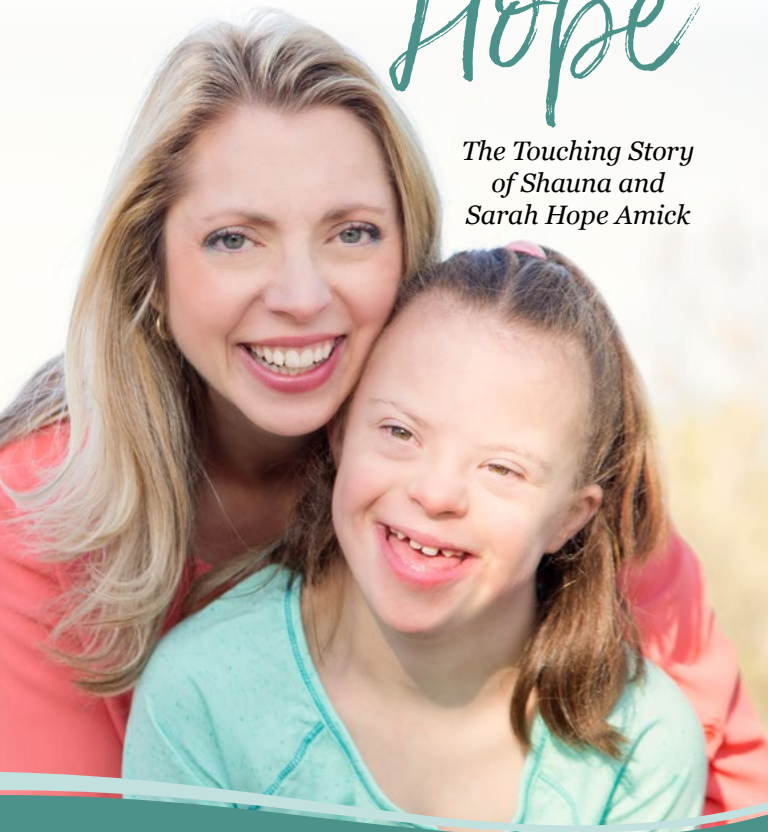


From Fear to Hope

*The Touching Story
of Shauna and
Sarah Hope Amick*



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Dear Friend,

One sunny afternoon not too long ago, my daughter Sarah and I decided to head off to the neighborhood playground. We weren't there long before we were approached by a curious little boy. I had been watching him while Sarah mastered the monkey bars, and he had been watching Sarah. Finally, he could contain his curiosity no longer.

"What's wrong with her?" he asked me. His question made me smile, for clearly he was motivated by nothing but simple and pure interest.

"There's nothing wrong with her," I explained. "Sarah has Down syndrome. She looks a little different than you, and she thinks a little differently, too, but she loves the playground just like you do. She loves the swings and the slides; she likes having fun. Really, she's more *like* you than different."

That answer seemed to satisfy, and for the next good while, Sarah and her new friend had a ball just loving life and loving the playground *together*. It made my mother's heart happy. God changed that little boy's perspective of Sarah – of Down syndrome. Over the years, He has changed mine, as well.

The Miracle of a Changed Perspective

I wish I could tell you that I embraced the thought of having a child with Down syndrome all those many years ago, but the truth is – I felt abandoned by God and considered having a baby with a disability nothing but a hardship. But God in His mercy met me in my desperation. I wrote about it in the article *Transcending Your Trials*. I hope it encourages you in whatever trial you might be facing....



Transcending Your Trials

From Fear to Hope

Would this *hard thing* that you're going through right now be any easier to deal with if you knew without a doubt that God sees it – He sees you – and He's committed to seeing this thing through with you? Would the heavy load you're carrying on behalf of your family, or on behalf of your ministry, feel any lighter if you could be confident that the Lord Himself was carrying it for you?

Hagar was a mistreated slave living in a foreign land. Pregnant and rejected, she fled to the desert to escape her circumstances. With no prospects, no support system, and no visible hope for the future, Hagar surely felt the weight of wondering, "How can I go on one more day like this?"

Enter the angel of the Lord. He spoke to the outcast Hagar, instructing her to go back to her difficult situation and deal with it knowing that God Almighty would be going back with her. Not only that, but He'd be keeping His eye on her and her baby through thick and thin.

Hagar's response to this angelic encounter rings full of hope overflowing. "She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,'

for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me'" (Genesis 16:13).

That is what made all the difference in Hagar's life. Her circumstances didn't miraculously change, but she had experienced the miracle of a changed perspective. Knowing that God is real, and He was really involved in her life story, gave Hagar renewed vision for what otherwise looked like a desperate situation. That realization helped me in my time of desperation, too.



After learning through ultrasound that my third child was diagnosed with Down syndrome and a potentially fatal heart defect, after praying for the remaining five months of pregnancy that God would heal my unborn

daughter's heart and allow her to be born without an intellectual disability, and after giving birth to our sweet Sarah Hope only to realize that God chose not to answer either of those prayer requests according to my plan, I was desperate. Desperate for a do-over, desperate to escape my new reality, desperate to know I had not been rejected by the God I so loved.

Sarah was born on a beautiful summer day and quickly started dying. She went from the delivery room straight to the neonatal intensive care unit where we then played a waiting game like nothing I had ever known before. *How many days could Sarah survive before open heart surgery became imminent?* Every day we waited allowed Sarah's veins, arteries, and tiny newborn heart to grow, thus increasing her



chances for successful surgery. Wait too long, however, and a new lease on life would pass her by.

The critical turning point in Sarah's story came when she was six weeks old. "Sarah has decided she'd like to have heart surgery now," was the compassionate way her cardiologist let us know we couldn't prolong things any longer. Our heart-wrenching situation was about to get even more complicated.

Consent forms were signed, Sarah was dedicated to the Lord in her hospital room, and I prepped myself for an all-night prayer vigil that would lead up to Sarah's early morning surgery. Holding my precious child in my arms, encumbered by all of her life support tubes and wires, I pleaded with God. *Save her, Jesus. Spare Sarah's life. Carry her through tomorrow's surgery. Carry me through this, God. My strength is gone. How can I go on one more day like this?*

It was then that Sarah's nurse walked into the room. She started shutting off monitors and unplugging Sarah from the various machines she had been connected to for all six weeks of her fragile life; machines I thought Sarah needed to survive. "I think you and Sarah should go for a walk, Mrs. Amick," said the nurse as she handed me a pager. "You can go anywhere you want in the hospital, just be back within 20 minutes." Her eyes finished her explanation.

I understood. Sarah could make it for 20 minutes without medical intervention. I also understood why Sarah's nurse was extending such grace. There was no guarantee my daughter would live through the next day's events, and I had never been given the blessing of holding her without hospital equipment between us. If Jesus decided to take Sarah home to heaven, this would be my one and only opportunity to love on her flesh to flesh.

I held Sarah close to my heart and decided I'd be back before the time limit was up. As I headed toward the elevator I realized I had no idea where I was going. All I knew is that I was being given the gift of escaping the hospital room that had confined my baby and me for what felt like forever. The elevator door closed off contact with the nightmare I was living, and – wanting to get as close to God as possible – I pushed the button to the hospital's highest floor.

Stepping out onto this unknown territory, I was met by floor to ceiling windows. The view was stunning; Boston's skyline at midnight is a lightshow illuminating countless souls needy for the One true God. I suddenly felt very small. Alone. Invisible. Numb from weeks and months of heartache, the only prayer I could whisper was, “Jesus.”



Enter the presence of the Lord. God's voice spoke directly to my core. “I see you,” He said, taking my breath away, and in that moment everything changed. The God of the Universe *sees me and sees this dying baby in my arms*. In the middle of this sea of confusion, God Almighty took time out of His schedule to meet with me at my point of desperation and set the record straight. He wasn't simply watching from a distance, hands limp by His side. He was actively working in my situation to work all things together for Sarah's good and for the ultimate good of our family, and because of that – because of Him – I knew that from then on *I could do this*.

My circumstances were still hard. Sarah would still have open heart surgery in just a few hours, and even if that surgery was successful, she still had Down syndrome. Meeting with God on the top floor of that hospital didn't miraculously change my daughter's diagnoses, but it did deliver the miracle of a changed perspective. My situation was no longer desperate. It was hope-full – my vision renewed.

Joni Eareckson Tada has lived with quadriplegia ever since her diving accident over 50 years ago. She understands our inherent need to trade in our human perspectives for God's point of view. "Life is hard," confesses Joni. "Trials are not for our pleasure; they are for our profit. Once you accept this truth," she continues, "You transcend it." Once you have eyes to see Jesus Christ carrying you through your trial, monumentally heavy burdens become easier to bear.

The Lord met Hagar in the desert. He gave her His perspective on her circumstances, and she was able to face her trials with new confidence.

The Lord met me on the top floor of a children's hospital. He spoke to my broken heart, allowing me to see my baby's health crisis *and my baby* with new eyes. The One who sees me brought me to a spacious place where I was able to transcend my own hopelessness, and that is what made all the difference.

What hard thing are you dealing with? It may not be Down syndrome or a heart defect. It may not be quadriplegia or the agony of rejection, but every one of us suffers trials of one sort or another. Life is hard. Life can be lonely. Conflicts and crises can leave us feeling isolated with little or no hope for better days.

The glorious truth that transcends all these scenarios is that *God sees you*. He sees you on your knees in prayer for your family's situation. He sees the sacrifices you make for the good of your ministry. He sees you facing one trial after another in a manner that blesses His Name, and He wants you to remember He is with you through it all. He will remove some of the obstacles in your path, and He'll ask you to walk through others, but through thick and thin God is by your side. The same Jesus who transcended death itself will lift you up to transcend whatever trial that is taunting you today.

Friend, when we welcome in God's perspective on the hard things in our lives, Jesus helps us see each new day with the promise of better things to come. And He gives us a glimpse of the God who sees us, in return.

"Jesus helps us see each new day with the promise of better things to come."

The Visible Power of God



Sarah is a spunky teenager now – full of joy and bursting with energy! She was born with Down syndrome, not because I did something wrong, and certainly not because God made a mistake. Sarah is who she is so that the work of God might be displayed in her life. Through her smile, through her giggle, and through *her* unwavering tenacity to persevere through hardships.

I see the power of God shining through Sarah when she thanks her nurse after a particularly painful medical procedure. I see the glory of God illuminated in her when she raises her hands in worship, unafraid and truly unmoved by any judgmental eyes surrounding her. If it's Down syndrome that catches people's stares and makes them contemplate the purpose behind Sarah's personality, then it's Down syndrome that's pointing people to Jesus.

God made Sarah for the same reason He made you and me; so that the work, the power, and the glory of the Lord might be put on display. Today, I encourage you to ask Jesus to give you eyes to see your situation from His heavenly vantage point. He can bring you from fear to a place of hope, and He can deliver the miracle of a changed perspective. Consider praying this prayer...

Dear Jesus,

When my situation seems desperate, help me to see You working in the midst of it. Renew my vision and increase my strength so that I can get through this trial in a way that honors You. Forgive me when I doubt You, Lord. I surrender my life to You and trust that You are always with me. Use my life to point people to You, and give me the courage I need to take the next steps with You. Thank You, Jesus.

Amen.



You can hear more of Shauna's – and Sarah's – story on the Joni and Friends radio program.

“Shauna has the unique gift of viewing disability challenges through the lens of God's Word. It's why I often invite her as a guest on the radio with me – she has *so much* to say when it comes to seeing life's hardships from God's point of view, encouraging *everyone* who listens. Tune in today at joniandfriends.org/radio and be *blessed*.”
– Joni Eareckson Tada

About

Shauna

Shauna Amick's passion for the inherent worth and dignity of every human life was deeply solidified when her third child was diagnosed with Down syndrome, a near fatal heart defect, and a slew of other genetic abnormalities. As a speaker, author and disability rights advocate, Shauna shares the unique gift of viewing challenges through the lens of God's Word, and does so with great transparency and vulnerability. Shauna serves as the Director of Radio Ministries for Joni and Friends, and can often be heard encouraging radio listeners alongside Joni Eareckson Tada.

If you have questions, need prayer, or would like more information on raising a child with special needs, contact us at joniandfriends.org.

Transcending Your Trials by Shauna Amick, M.Ed. was first published in *Just Between Us* Magazine, volume 25, number 2.

Joni and Friends is an international Christian ministry that brings the Good News of Jesus to the world's one billion people affected by disability. With its life-changing programs, Joni and Friends serves the world's neediest – the last, the least, and the lost.



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