A watercolor illustration of a field of yellow flowers, possibly rapeseed or mustard, in the foreground. The flowers are rendered in various shades of yellow and green, with some in sharp focus and others blurred. In the background, there are dark, silhouetted trees and a light blue sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall style is soft and artistic.

Ellie Hart

POSTCARDS OF HOPE

Words and pictures to breathe life into your heart

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Words and pictures to breathe life into your heart

Ellie Hart



| **Hope** /həʊp/: **n.** An optimistic attitude of mind,
based on the expectation of positive outcomes.



Introduction

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.
It enters the inner sanctuary, behind the curtain, where our
forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.*

HEBREWS 6:19–20

I hear a lot about hope: how we need it to survive, how people cling to it, how painful it is to have lost it. The Bible describes it as an anchor for the soul; something to keep you steady and secure, perhaps even on a stormy sea.

Hope is extraordinarily powerful, but if it is shown to be false, the disappointment can be utterly crushing. We all need to anchor our souls to something beyond ourselves, but when you're being tossed about by the waves, having your hope-rope tied to anything that is in this world is just like being anchored to another set of waves; there's no guarantee of stability coming.

And yet true hope, the hope that the Bible holds out to us, is in a different league altogether. As Hebrews tells us, it is anchored not in this world, but on the other side of the curtain, in the place where Jesus has gone ahead of us, in the presence of God.

I may be like a tiny boat on a vast ocean but deep, deep down and beyond, I am fixed irrevocably to something other than more waves: something solid and unmoveable; something which contains the ocean itself.

A while ago, God spoke to me about starting to write postcards of hope – pictures with a message on the back that would be little bursts of real, solid hope for a world that needs it more than ever.

I wonder if you've ever watched someone make a ship in a bottle? The crafter makes the little boat in pieces, with its masts and sails on tiny hinges so that it can fold up, becoming slender enough to slip in through the neck of the bottle. Once it's inside and fixed into place, he pulls on the very fine threads and gently raises the mast, unfurling the sails to fill the space.

My prayer is that as you read these postcards, God would use the stories and pictures to slide truth gently into your heart. Once it's in there, may he slowly and gently unfurl its sails so that it spreads out and becomes a part of who you are: hope anchoring you to the Rock.

Ellie Hart



A burst of yellow flowers

It was as if a painter had knocked over a huge tin of bright yellow paint and splashes of it had ended up all over the city.

For most of the year, there is no water at all visible in the little creek that runs through the outskirts of town. The riverbed and the fields around it are dry and bare, with only the dull green of eucalyptus and olive trees to break up the grey-white of rocks and dust.

But this particular winter, rain had fallen. Days and days of it and melting snow from the mountains had swelled the dried-up river from a tiny trickle to a babbling brook.

And then, just as the rain slowed and the sun reappeared, came a burst of yellow wildflowers, gathered together, dancing in the spring breeze and refusing to be ignored.

It's wonderful to realise that spring is coming, that a winter season is past, but it's easy to forget that the flowers that make my heart sing are there as a direct result of the cloud and rain of the winter months.

Life isn't always springtime, but for those of you who don't see the flowers yet, for those of you who are still living in a season of cloudy skies, rain or storms, hear this: the flowers are coming.

The seeds are deep in the ground but soaking up the rain, and the day is coming when the warmth of the presence of God will call them to burst out in your life. Before you know it, they'll be springing up in unexpected places, nodding gently in the gaps in the garage forecourt, spilling out across patches of wasteland and partying wildly in newly green fields.

I don't always have the ability to see it coming – but I do know that eventually the day comes when Jesus calls out to me and to you:

*Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, come with me.
See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.
Flowers appear on the earth.*

SONG OF SONGS 2:10-12



FOR YOUR JOURNAL

What kind of season are you in right now?

True hope comes from meditating on the expectation of the positive outcomes that we have to look forward to in Jesus. Look through Ephesians 1 and see what ‘yellow flowers’ you can find in there.

How does the season you’re in look or feel different in the light of the promises of the future?



Brownies

Did you know that when the recipe for chocolate brownies first hit the UK, it caused great confusion and disappointment? It's true. Bakers all over the country found the brownies wouldn't cook 'properly' and didn't turn out as expected. People thought there must have been a terrible error in the recipe – it took Brits a while to learn that squidgy can be a good thing in a cake.

Sometimes life is like this: ministry, family, jobs, health, security, etc. just don't turn out as we expected and planned. Sometimes this is because of our mistakes, or someone else's; often it's because we live in a broken world; and perhaps sometimes it's because, like the brownies, they were never supposed to be the way we'd imagined.

The truth is that more or less everyone is living a different life to the one they'd expected. Even those whose social media might suggest otherwise are facing trials behind the scenes, because life is, on the whole, neither fair nor easy. The rain falls.

But God is good, and with us, and there is an alternative to disappointment, confusion and resentment. There has to be, because those things will eat you up from the inside.

It's this:

You eat the brownies.

They might not be quite what you expected, but they do taste good.

I know many of you are facing situations so hard you can barely stand up. Sometimes life isn't good. Sometimes it's so far away from what you'd hoped it would be that it makes you grieve in the depths of your soul for what might have been.

Mostly, we don't get a lot of choice over which life we live, but we do have a choice in how we face our unexpected lives and how we adjust our attitude towards them.

Perhaps today we can acknowledge that our 'brownies' are not what we expected, not what we asked for or hoped for; but perhaps we can pull together the courage, take a breath, reach for God's hand and eat them.

I hope you will find that, in some unexpected way, they are good.

I had a dream,
I had a plan,
I had a hope,
and courage,
and they haven't turned out as I expected.
Breathe on my dreams,
because you have a plan
and that gives me enough hope
and courage
to live for your glory even in the unexpected.



FOR YOUR JOURNAL ---

Has your life turned out as you expected?

What particular situations or disappointments do you need courage to face just now?

In what ways is your life still good?

Ask God to help you see how you can still live a life that is good and brings glory to him even in the middle of its unexpectedness.



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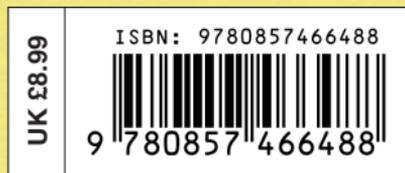
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An unusual and beautiful gift, **POSTCARDS OF HOPE** is a collection of watercolours by Ellie Hart, each with a short reflection aimed at helping the reader hear from God. It's for the tired and weary and those who want to have God breathe new life into their relationship with him.

Ellie Hart is a writer and artist, offering a ministry combining art and prayer. She believes in finding beauty in the ordinary; that sometimes pictures and story can speak to our hearts in a way that words alone can't manage; and that God always has something to say. She is the author of *Postcards from Heaven* (BRF, 2016).



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