

# H<sub>2</sub>OPE

For New Beginnings



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## **PREFACE – *Finding Ourselves in Waters of Hope***

Without H<sub>2</sub>O, none of us has a hope; water is vital for physical life. And that crucial need also makes water a vibrant picture of the spiritual dimension of life. We thirst for life in its fulness, for joy and freedom, and sometimes for a chance to start over.

Escaping slaves during the American Civil War era learned to keep to the water, wading in ditches, creeks or streams so that tracking dogs could not follow their scent. Their friends working in the fields would sing aloud the old negro spiritual “Wade in the Water” as a secret warning to the escapees to travel smart. Singing the song helped keep alive the dream of freedom for everyone. Water was their path to freedom and new beginnings.

When Israel escaped to freedom from Egypt they lost hope when their path was blocked by the Red Sea. But by divine miracle, they found themselves walking through the sea instead of being drowned by it. The God of the waters was their Deliverer, their Hope. They recounted how God continued to provide water bursting from rocks as they crossed the thirsty wilderness to the Promised Land.

The narrative of the Old Testament is full of stories of people who found themselves at rivers, springs and wells, who faced storms, floods and droughts; we see them washing, thirsting, drowning. As they found themselves in these deep-water experiences, they also mysteriously found God in a deeper way.

But Hope struggles as the story of Israel unfolds from its hopeful beginnings through disappointment and eventual exile from their cherished land. The Old Testament ends with a spiritual drought and a longing for streams to flow in the parched desert. Isaiah and other prophets promised that one day God will bring a resurgence of hope and that joy will flow again.

The New Testament tells how that promise of renewal is fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus had a lot to say about freedom, renewal and joy – and about water. He even called himself the living water that our souls crave. The stories in this collection explore the life and words of Jesus, how Jesus joined our turbulent humanity and how through him the river of God’s grace flows into all our lives, offering water for everyone who is thirsty, joy for burned-out spirits, forgiveness for hard hearts and fresh hope for discouraged souls.

Read these stories and reflections with curiosity and imagination, alone or with a friend. I’m sure you will find yourself in many of them as I do. Explore them with a questioning mind and let them inspire your heart and stimulate you to plunge into a way of life that spells freedom and hope.

David Knight