

# THE TEXT

• PART 3 •

## OPERATION GINGERBREAD HOUSE

Three days before Christmas, with snow flurries in the forecast and an ache in her heart, Hope Frazier pulled into Dawn's driveway and stared at the Christmas lights twinkling in the window. She took a deep breath and willed herself out of the car and up the steps.

by CHRIS FABRY

A DOG BARKED inside when she rang the doorbell, and when she stepped in, the fluffy ball of white fur was all over her, hopping and wagging its tail. Hope knelt and tried to pet her as she wriggled and sniffed and barked.

"Muffin, settle down," Dawn said, wiping her hands on her apron.

"This is quite a welcome," Hope said.

Dawn gave her a hug. "That dog has been such a comfort. I hesitated to take her in, but she has brought such life."

"Was she a rescue?"

"She was my brother's dog. He moved overseas, and I volunteered to watch her until he found her a home. She's been here ever since. Come on in the kitchen."

Hope saw trays of cookies and breathed in the sweet aroma of gingerbread and cinnamon. "I hope all of this is not for me. Are you baking for an army?"

Dawn chuckled. "You'll see. Give me your coat and put on this apron."

Hope had met her new friend at church, and they made a fast, deep connection because of their shared pain. Hope's children were estranged from her and her husband, which meant no access to her grandchildren. Dawn had provided a listening ear but hadn't shared much of her own journey.

"You up for a little decorating?" Dawn said.

"The cupcakes need icing."

"I can try," Hope said.

She was on her third cupcake when she said, "I want to hear how you've held up these last three years. The death of your husband, then losing your grandchildren."

"It was a double wound," Dawn said. "But the decision to keep me from the grandkids felt so cruel."

Dawn described the meeting with her daughter at the coffee shop. "I guess I sensed them pulling away. But it still felt like a punch in the stomach. At first, I believed if I prayed hard enough, God would turn things around."

"Someone told me your grandchildren lived not far from here. That must have made it even more difficult."

Dawn rolled cookie dough and nodded. "So close, but so far away. I ached to see them. Have them spend the night. Read them a story. And I fought anger and resentment, but I was losing the battle. I had to get help."

"From who?"

"You know Rebecca, at church. She was a counselor before her kids came along. She came here and had me to her house. I spent a lot of money on tissues. Having Rebecca listen was such a gift."

"And you had Muffin," Hope said.





Dawn laughed. “I think that dog knew more about the pain I was going through than I did. But there came a point where Rebecca pushed back.”

“What do you mean?”

“My goal was getting my grandkids back. So I looked for a strategy. And Rebecca affirmed my grieving but gently suggested I choose between outcome or process.”

Hope furrowed her brow.

“Exactly my response,” Dawn said. “She observed that I was committed to the outcome. I wanted to figure out what to say, how to act, how to get the grandkids back. I wanted the pain gone.”

“What was the alternative?”

Dawn put the next cookie pan in the oven and wiped her hands on her apron. “I had to choose whether to trust in myself or trust in God.”

Hope frowned. “I don’t know if I can do that.”

Dawn lifted her head, as if she heard something and checked the front door.

“Who are you expecting?” Hope said.

“You’ll see.” Dawn opened several boxes of graham crackers and arranged them on the table.

“So if you didn’t try to control things, what did you do?”

“First, I journaled my thoughts and feelings. I got honest with God. And I noticed how real the emotion is in Psalms: ‘I pour out my complaint before him.’<sup>1</sup> I filled up several notebooks, pouring

out my complaints. And Rebecca was right. God began to do something. I still longed to be with those children. I grieved that loss. But I needed to give them to Him and ask Him for a breakthrough.”

Hope studied the kitchen table. “Did He give you that?”

Dawn nodded. “The breakthrough was that my daughter and her family moved a four-hours’ drive from here.”

“What? That doesn’t sound like a breakthrough.”

“It was another deep loss. That move brought fresh grief and more questions. Which led me back to my journal and Psalms. Back to the process. And I kept seeing the word *forgiveness* in different passages. I’d argue with God that I would forgive as soon as they apologized and let me see my grandkids. And the question surfaced, *Am I ready to extend the kind of forgiveness God extended to me? Could I forgive in the middle of the pain?*”

Hope put her hands on the table and leaned forward, shaking her head. “I’m in the same place. I can believe God’s in control in my head. But in my heart, I keep failing. I come back to square one.”

“But you see, you’re not,”

Dawn said. “You’re never back where you started, even if it feels that way. You’re moving forward. I used to play Candy Land® with my daughter. All it took was one card, and you were back near the start.”

“I would love to play that with my grands again,” Hope said.

“And I pray you will. But my prayer changed to, ‘Lord, help me desire You in this hard process. Give me the faith to trust You today. I believe You’re in control. Help my unbelief.’”

Dawn rose and grabbed a box of tissues and sat it in front of Hope. She went to the door again, then returned and opened a bag of gum drops and placed assorted candies by the graham crackers. “They’ll be here soon.”

“Who?” Hope said.

“My guests are going to make gingerbread houses, and I’ve appointed you as judge.”

“Who are your guests?”

Dawn gave her a look. She raised her eyebrows and a stifled smile.

“Your grandchildren are coming?” Hope said.

Dawn shook her head. “Not yet. I live in the land of not yet. The land of waiting expectantly. Which is what Christmas is about, right?”

“I suppose.”

“About a year ago, I was sitting in church, feeling hollow. I had surrendered all I knew to surrender. The pastor mentioned an urgent need for a third-grade Sunday School teacher. As soon as he said it, I felt a stirring. And I thought if I can’t be with my grandchildren, maybe God wants to use me in someone else’s life.”

“Lord, help me desire You in this hard process. Give me the faith to trust You today.”

The doorbell rang, and Muffin barked. Two children ran inside, giggling and squealing as the dog greeted them.

“Is that gingerbread?” the girl said with a slight lisp.

“Sure is,” Dawn said.

“Doesn’t it smell good?”

“Smells like Christmas,” the boy said.

Another doorbell ring. More children from Dawn’s class tumbled inside. Hope watched the kids begin their graham-cracker construction. But the ache inside didn’t dissipate; it increased. She couldn’t help imagining her own grandchildren at this table.

Dawn put an arm around her and gave her a hug.

Through tears, Hope said, “This doesn’t fix it.”

“No, it doesn’t. But doesn’t it make the waiting a little sweeter?” ☁

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 142:2

Read Part 1 in July 2025 and Part 2 in September 2025 *Mature Living* or visit [lifeway.com/matureliving](https://lifeway.com/matureliving).

CHRIS FABRY is an award-winning author of more than 80 books, including *Saving Grayson* and *The Forge*. He hosts Chris Fabry Live on Moody Radio. His online home is [ChrisFabry.com](https://ChrisFabry.com).