

A 30-DAY JOURNEY
OF INSPIRATION, FAITH, AND ACTION

**Now's
the
Time!**





Now's the Time

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Interior Design by Alexia Garaventa

Written by Jeremy Jones

Edited by Tia Smith

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To:

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INTRODUCTION

We hope that this book is a next step in your journey of faith. As you read and reflect on each of the thirty devotions, may God continue to draw you closer to His heart and fill you with hope, grace, connection, and compassion.

This book is also an invitation to continue exploring church and your place in our community. We believe church is so much more than the four walls of a building. As a church, we are a body, a group of people who come together to collectively turn our attention toward God and remember Whose we are. We join to worship our God and to be transformed by Him. We share our hopes together. We extend grace to one another as God has extended grace to each of us. We connect with each other in our joys and pains, our highs

and lows, our hard times and blessings. And we offer compassion to each other and to the world around us as living reminders of the love and forgiveness offered to us all in Christ.

This book can be read alone, with a partner, or as part of a small-group study. However you read it, and wherever you are on your spiritual journey, this book can be a guide to the next steps in your relationship with God. Let Him be your true guide as you take time to reflect on Scripture and to write down your own thoughts, prayers, struggles, and victories. Will you allow God to fill you and lead you deeper into His story?

Jump in. Get started today. As 2 Corinthians 6:2 tells us, “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” Don’t let today pass you by.

IT'S TIME

*Yet a time is coming and has now come
when the true worshipers will worship the Father
in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind
of worshipers the Father seeks.*

(John 4:23)

THERE IS AN OLD SUMMER camp skit where a line of people sit in chairs with their legs crossed on an empty stage. At various intervals, the last person in line asks the next person, "Is it time?" The question gets passed from person to person until it reaches the first person, who looks at her watch and answers, "No, not yet." This goes on and on until finally the first person's reply changes to "It's time!" At this point everyone switches which leg is crossed and goes back to

staring blankly ahead. The skit is funny at best, depressing at worst. But it reflects how easily we allow the schedules and constraints of our world to dictate what we do and when we do it—and we often find that we are consumed with the unimportant.

Now is the time for that to change. It's time for more. God wants to redeem our time—our past, present, and future. He wants to infuse the eternal into our limited time on earth. And He wants to start today. John 4:23 says that the time has come when the Father is looking for those who will worship, not based on rules, regulations, or obligations, but in the Spirit and in truth.

How do we do that? Through thoughtful study of Scripture, in conversation with God through prayer, and by simply abiding in Him. Throw off the temptation to just keep going and instead

take the time to rest in Him, worship Him for who He is, and allow Him to bring more hope, grace, connection, and compassion into your life.

What time is it in your life? What is it time for? Will you open your heart and allow God to fill you and lead you deeper into relationship with Him?



A small, green plant with two leaves and a single flower is growing out of a crack in a light-colored concrete surface. The plant is centered in the frame, and its shadow is cast to the right. The background is a solid, light blue color.

Time for
HOPE

SECURE HOPE

*We have this hope as an anchor
for the soul, firm and secure.*

(Hebrews 6:19)

THE WIND IS HOWLING; THE waves are crashing. Heavy rain pelts down, and water surges all around. A boat caught in bad weather depends on its anchor for survival. While we often think an anchor is just used to keep a boat in one place, that only happens in calm waters. An anchor isn't actually tied onto anything; it merely holds a boat in a general area by preventing it from drifting too far. But perhaps more importantly, an anchor is used to stabilize a boat in inclement weather. The heavy object creates drag through the water, slowing the boat down. The anchor

can also prevent a boat from turning sideways to the waves and being overwhelmed by them. Rather than something that weighs a boat down or holds it back, the anchor provides protection in the worst situations and increases control. For anyone caught on a boat in a storm, a good anchor is vital.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that our hope in God is our anchor in life, and it's a good anchor—firm and secure. We often think of hope in different terms. Our ordinary use of hope implies uncertainty—we hope for something that may or may not happen. Or we hope for something we desire but that seems out of reach. But our hope in the Lord is just the opposite. Biblical hope is a confident expectation, a sure desire. Like an anchor, it provides protection when the storms of life come and the waves rise. Our hope is in the One who controls the waves. He is unchanging and all-powerful.

He is mighty yet loves each of us. We can hold tight and place our hope in Him, knowing He will anchor us in the storm.

What in your life feels firm and secure? What do you hope in and for? How does seeing hope in God as firm and secure change the way you trust and obey Him?

HOPE IN UNFAILING LOVE

*The LORD delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love.*

(Psalm 147:11)

IN 2012, FILMMAKER JAMES CAMERON became the first person to solo dive to the deepest part of the ocean, the Mariana Trench's Challenger Deep, as part of his documentary *Deepsea Challenge 3D*. Going 6.8 miles deep in his submarine, Cameron took pictures, gathered scientific data, and saw with his own eyes what no one has seen since a 1960 expedition took the deep dive. And then he had to get back to the surface.

The design of the submarine depended heavily on weights that would carry the ship down to the depths and then release when the pilot was ready to come back up. Those weights dropping were vital to the mission. They could not fail. Cameron's only hope of seeing daylight after his record-breaking dive rested on those weights. And so he and his team tried them time and again. They were tested over and over. Placing hope in something unreliable at 6.8 miles under the ocean would mean certain death.

What is our hope in? When we find ourselves under pressure, what do we depend on? It needs to be something secure and unfailing, and the Bible tells us the only sure thing is God's love. Technically, even something as tested and reliable as Cameron's weight system *could* have failed. But God's love does not. His love never fails.

God's love is stronger and more powerful than any other force in or beyond the universe. That's

where fear comes in. It seems almost strange to our ears to hear that God delights in those who fear Him. But the delight comes because those who fear God do not fear the world. The world is not our ultimate threat because God is even more powerful. When we recognize that, we can place ourselves in that tension between the fear of the Lord and His unfailing love that casts out all fear. God delights in those who recognize who He is and put their trust in Him. And we have hope in His unfailing love because nothing in the world can overcome it.

What do you fear? How can recognizing the power of God's unfailing love help you to place your hope in Him?

FROM SUFFERING TO HOPE

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

(Romans 5:2–5)

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN LOST? Have you ever found yourself driving in a new city or hiking through the woods and had that nagging feeling that you just aren't going the right way? You may be following the landmarks or the directions someone gave you, and your map says you're on track—but it just doesn't feel quite right. Things aren't as you expected.

This passage can feel a little bit that way. In our spiritual journeys, we want hope. Hope is, well, hopeful. But the way to get there can often feel wrong. It seems like hope should feel good—like encouragement and victory. But hope is counterintuitive. First we suffer, then we must persevere in that suffering. That builds character in us, and out of that comes hope. It's not such a feel-good process. But the beauty comes at the end of verse 5. It's like that moment when you turn the corner and suddenly your destination is before you. Nothing felt quite right along the way, but you have made it. Hope doesn't put us to shame because it is based on God's unfailing love poured into our hearts. That is why way back at the point of suffering, we can "glory" or rejoice in our suffering. Because we know that even when we feel lost, we are headed straight for hope.

What suffering are you experiencing right now? Can you see the destination of hope? How does the assurance that you are headed in the right direction help in the tough moments of today?

OVERFLOWING WITH HOPE

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 15:13)

NOTHING SAYS SUMMER LIKE A backyard wading pool. Put the hose in, fill it to the top with freezing cold water, and you have hours of endless summer fun for kids, adults, even dogs. But filling the pool can seem to take forever. Even with the hose on full blast, it feels slow. For most of the process, the filling of the pool is hardly even noticeable. But when the water reaches the top rim and starts to spill over the

sides, you see more clearly just how much water is flowing. Suddenly it's overflowing and hard to stop. The overflow quickly floods everything around the pool.

This is a picture of God's hope in our lives. Sometimes we don't feel it. Sometimes it is hard to see that God is even working or filling us—the process is slow. But He doesn't stop there. God's desire is that we overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. He wants the flow of His peace and hope in our lives to become visibly unstoppable. Why? First, because He loves us and wants us to know His abundant love. But it doesn't stop there. God wants the overflow of hope in our lives to flood the people around us. He wants our excess to spread to everyone and everything we encounter so that even more of our world will know the hope, joy, and peace that come from knowing Jesus Christ.

Where in your life do you feel like the filling is slow? Where in your life do you see the overflowing flood impacting others? How can you use that overflow of hope to deepen your relationship with God and point others to Him?

JOYFUL HOPE

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

(Romans 12:12)

ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS. BACON, LETTUCE, tomato. Faith, hope, love. There are lots of things that go together in threes. While each one of the three is a separate thing, they fit together into a perfect trio. So much so that we can't think of one without the others—the balance would be off and the triangle incomplete.

Romans 12 contains a perfect trio of principles for the Christian to live by: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” They go together—but unlike BLTs, we often prefer to separate these from each other and just take the one

we like best. We prefer to take the joyful hope without the patient affliction or faithful prayer. But the truth is, as we walk through life, the three are not separate. They are all part of our journeys here on earth. In this world there will always be affliction right alongside joy. And both the joy and the affliction mean we need to stay in communication with God. They are a trio in the lives of Christ followers, and we should let each in turn remind us of the importance of the others.

Where in your life do you see each of these parts of the trio? How can your relationship with God be strengthened by embracing all three?

WAIT IN HOPE

*We wait in hope for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.*

(Psalm 33:20)

PICTURE THE HIGHEST, ROCKIEST MOUNTAIN cliff you've seen. Now imagine yourself as a climber, stranded there. Sheer drop-offs on all sides, crumbling and unstable rock all around. Now imagine two different scenarios. In the first, you realize that nobody knows where you are. There is no way to contact anyone for rescue. There is a desperate franticness to your waiting. But change the scenario with one detail—you know that rescue is on its way. The mountain is still high, the cliffs are still sheer, your position is still risky. But the hope you feel knowing rescue is coming changes everything, even before they arrive.

Romans 8:24–25 says, “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

The way hope of rescue changes the mountain scene is also true in our daily lives. When our circumstances are overwhelming, when we are in desperate need of physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual rescue, hope in God as our help and shield changes everything. Confident hope encourages patience because we are not questioning if but simply *when*.

Are there areas of life where you feel like the climber stranded on the cliff? How are you waiting? How can hope in God’s help bring patience?

PLANS FOR HOPE

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”*

(Jeremiah 29:11)

THE LAST ONE OF DR. SEUSS’S books published during his lifetime is called *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* Perhaps you’ve heard it read at a graduation or been given the book as a going-away gift. Like much of Dr. Seuss’s work, it is profound despite its simple singsong style. Phrases like these stick with you:

You’re off to Great Places!

Today is your day!

Your mountain is waiting.

So get on your way!

And will you succeed?

Yes! You will, indeed!

(98 and $\frac{3}{4}$ percent guaranteed).¹

In a similar way, this verse from Jeremiah is often read or given to young people embarking on a new stage of life. People on the brink of adventure and discovery, not sure what life holds; people trying to make plans but unsure of what they should be as their entire future lies ahead of them. But while both of these men wrote about the journey of life, this verse in Jeremiah offers so much more—it is so much broader and deeper.

God does not have just one adventure, one plan—but many plans, good plans. These plans

1. Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (New York: Random House Children's Books, 1960), 44, 42.

are not simply about what job we will get, who we will be in relationship with, or where we will live. God's plans are about our hearts—who we are becoming and who God is revealing Himself to be in our lives. Our journeys aren't 98 and $\frac{3}{4}$ percent guaranteed, they are 100 percent guaranteed because they rest in the hands of the all-powerful God of the universe. That doesn't mean we are guaranteed great wealth and perfect health. It means that God promises He is in control and He is our hope and our future—both on earth and eternally.

Do you find yourself more focused on the immediate journey or the eternal one? How can knowing that God has good plans for you help as you make decisions each day? What encouragement do you feel from this promise?