

**you**

BUILDING A LIFE YOU LOVE

**are**

WITHOUT HAVING

**not**

EVERYTHING YOU WANT

**behind**

**meghan ryan asbury**




HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

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Cover design by Good Mood Design Company

Interior design by Janelle Coury

## You Are Not Behind

Copyright © 2024 by Meghan Ryan Asbury

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8823-0 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8824-7 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024931185

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**Printed in the United States of America**

24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 / BP / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**For Brenna:**

*You not only lived this alongside me,  
but you have lived it better than anyone I know.*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword . . . . .	9
Introduction: How Did I Get Here? . . . . .	11
1. Will I Ever Catch Up? . . . . .	19
2. I Feel Like I'm Missing Out... Because I Kind of Am. . . . .	33
3. Wait, I'm Not the Only One? . . . . .	45
4. Is This My Punishment? . . . . .	59
5. You Might Always Grieve What Did (or Did Not) Happen . . . . .	73
6. What Do I <i>Really</i> Want? . . . . .	85
7. Do I Want This Too Much? . . . . .	99
8. They Are Not Ahead . . . . .	113
9. They Understand More Than You Think They Do . . .	127
10. An Obvious (but Unlikely) Way to Love Your Life . . .	141
11. When the Thing You Looked Forward to the Most Made You Feel the Worst About Yourself . . . . .	153

12. This Isn't What It's All About . . . . .	169
13. You Are Not Behind . . . . .	183
Epilogue: The Next Chapter . . . . .	193
How to Know Jesus Personally . . . . .	199
“What Do I Really Want?” Chart . . . . .	201
Additional Resources on Spiritual Disciplines . . . . .	205
30 Questions to Ask Your Friend at Coffee Instead of Asking “What’s New?” . . . . .	207
Notes . . . . .	209

# Foreword

BY LYSA TERKEURST

THE LAST TEN years of my life have included a lot of tears. Fears. Intense heartbreak. Countless hours of counseling. Wondering and asking God, “Why?” Making a tiny bit of progress. Then regress. Feeling so unsettled. Trying to step forward but wondering where to go. Secretly thinking everyone else is figuring this out but not me.

The death of my marriage left me feeling not only behind but completely devastated.

I don’t know what pain you are carrying today, but chances are you have arrived here with some of these same feelings too.

You didn’t think life would be like this. You didn’t think circumstances would be like this. You didn’t think you would be like this. You didn’t think they would be like this. You didn’t think God would be like this.

I have said these words. I have been in this place. I promise I understand.

But this is what I’ve come to know: Our life may be different than what we thought it would be, but it can still be good.

A day is coming when there will no longer be a gap between our expectations and experiences. They will be one and the same. We won’t be hurt. We won’t live hurt. We won’t be disappointed,

and we won't live disappointed. Not in people. Not in ourselves. Not in God. Our feelings and faith will nod in agreement.

But as you know, we don't live there yet. Therefore, what can we do today?

I have a challenge for you...and it's one I've gleaned from my friend Meghan many times:

*Get your hopes up.*

The enemy wants us to be so consumed with our unmet expectations that we lose sight of Jesus completely. He wants our inner selves to be sick with hopelessness (Proverbs 13:12), full of doubt, and disillusioned with our circumstances, other people, and God.

Oh friend, don't let the enemy get you down. Instead, get your hopes up.

You may have experienced twists and turns in your story. Distractions and delays. Undeserving interruptions and setbacks. But even when everything else seems uncertain, the goodness and kindness of God is something we can count on and something we can build our hope upon.

In the pages of this book, your tender heart will be cared for by someone who gets it. Meghan is honest and vulnerable and chooses to bravely go first—saying the things most of us feel but are too afraid to say out loud. This is not a book full of self-help hype about how to make your life better. This book is full of rich scriptural truth that will point you to the Bread of Life—Jesus. Your sustainer and Savior, the author AND finisher of your story (Hebrews 12:2).

Meghan will help you learn to live in hopeful anticipation again as you realize you are not behind. You are right where you're supposed to be. Full of potential. Full of possibilities. Full of purpose.

I know this to be true because I know Him.

Much love from me to you, friend.

—Lysa TerKeurst

## INTRODUCTION

# How Did I Get Here?

NOVEMBER 2018

I lay on my bed and stared at another popcorn ceiling.

The ceiling started to blur as tears ran down my cheeks.

In my midtwenties, I had just moved into my eighth house in eight years, with my thirteenth roommate—wait, make that fourteenth roommate, another one had just married. I really hoped this most recent move would be the last one for a while. But there I was. Different roommate. Different popcorn ceiling. But the same feelings hovered just beneath the surface:

*How did this become my life?*

*Did I miss something?*

*Am I ever going to be where I want to be?*

The five-year plan I'd mentally made for my life did not include having a million roommates, moving every year, living in my hometown, being single, dumping my life savings into a hand-me-down car, and working a job I sort of hated. It featured a cute husband, maybe a kid or two, a house we owned, a golden retriever, and a white SUV with tan leather interior and a sunroof.

But right then, I silently cried at the ceiling as I wondered where God was, what he was doing, and whether anything would ever change.

Not only was I questioning how in the world I had gotten to

that point, but I also had no idea how to move forward. I felt stuck. Everything I wanted to change was out of my control. Looking back now, maybe I had more power to change things than I thought, but every single area that I wished was different seemed to hinge on something just out of my reach. I didn't get to write the script for the life I longed for. All of it seemed totally unfair.

We'll talk more about this a little later, but back when I was 21, I had decided to go all-in on the following Jesus thing. As long as I followed the rules, I assumed, God would give me the life I wanted—though I now understand this is really *not* how faith works. But as the years passed and life wasn't turning out as planned, I silently started to feel like God was holding out on me. I found myself saying: "God, if this is plan A for my life, I no longer want it."

## AM I MISSING SOMETHING?

It's not that I had a bad life. In fact, on paper, some would say it was a great life. I had checked a lot of those adulting boxes: I had good friends, was young and healthy, and got to travel to cool places for work. I somehow even managed to afford to live by the beach.

But the issue wasn't what I had; it was what I didn't have.

I couldn't understand why God wasn't cosigning the life plan I had written—especially since he seemed to be doing that for everyone else I knew. That simultaneously made me question him and myself.

Have you ever felt this way? As though you got stuck with a life you never wanted? As if everyone but you seemed to have gotten the memo on how to get what you want?

Maybe you feel as if people keep graduating to new phases of life, but you're the only one not moving on from where you are. Whether you're watching another friend get married or have a baby

or buy a home or get promoted, it's easy to look around and wonder: *Did I miss something?*

In those moments I often start questioning myself: *Am I not in the right city or at the right job? Did I miss what God was calling me to do? Is this a result of mistakes I've made? Why does it seem like things are happening for everyone else but me?*

Where does this tension come from?

For the first 18 years of our lives or so, many of us are on the same playing field. We go to school, we have our activities or sports, and we hang out with our friends. Then everyone goes in different directions. All of a sudden, we can be the same age as the person next to us but in a completely separate life stage. Your peer may be married with three kids in the suburbs, while the other is living in the city and climbing the corporate ladder.

And then there are people like me, wondering what on earth a 401(k) is and swiping through apps, trying to find a seemingly normal person to go on a date with.

For so long, we are taught to work toward mile-markers and goals. Go to school, get good grades, study hard, and get summers off. Maybe you go to college or get a job after graduating high school. But then what happens?

Depending on where you live and your family of origin, you can experience varying cultural pressures of what your life is supposed to look like. What's expected of you as a 28-year-old living in New York City can be vastly different from someone in Birmingham, Alabama.

We also have an ever-present reminder of what is going on in the lives of friends, family, and strangers: the rabbit hole called social media. The internet is a kind of wonderland that shows us something different from reality. It can trick us into believing everyone else's lives are better than ours.

Plus, what if we don't know what we want to do with our lives? Or who we want to be?

It's no wonder we constantly feel behind.

If we're not feeling behind, maybe we're feeling like our lives haven't started yet. Or worse, maybe we're worried life has already passed us by.

## IT'S POSSIBLE TO BUILD A LIFE YOU LOVE

Though it's been years since I cried and stared at that particular popcorn ceiling, I'll confess something to you: My life still doesn't look anything like I thought it would at this point.

Many days I'm disappointed by my reality because my circumstances haven't yet been tied up in a pretty bow. Maybe you have similar circumstances you wish were different. Or maybe a gap exists between where you are and where you want to be, but you just aren't sure what you can do about it. If this is true for you, I want to invite you to go there with me, because I think we may both come out the other side a little better than we started.

Because today, I can say with full confidence that even though I don't have everything I want, I deeply love my life.

While I was busy wishing for so many things to be different, God filled my life with more joy than I could've dared to imagine possible. Not because I cracked the code to happiness or manipulated myself into delusional optimism with Band-Aid Bible verse answers. But because I realized true satisfaction can be found between where you are and where you want to be.

Maybe you're thinking, *Sounds great for you, Meghan, but that doesn't seem possible for me.* Which you have every right to think.

For a long time, I thought that way too. Which is why I'm glad you are here. You could have picked up any book today, but you chose this one. I'm not sure how or why it made its way to you. Maybe it was the intriguing title or cover. Maybe it was a gift given to you by someone who was not-so-subtly trying to tell you something.

But maybe you're simply holding this book because life doesn't look like you thought it would. Maybe you're disappointed with where you are and struggling to move forward.

## **True satisfaction can be found between where you are and where you want to be.**

I have been asking myself one really big question, and as we take this journey together, I want to ask it of you too:

What if we are missing the best parts of our lives  
because we are too busy looking around us?

I especially feel this tension when I look at the generation I'm part of and the one coming behind me. Sometimes it keeps me up at night. I'm afraid we are missing out on the best parts of life because we are stuck wishing for different ones. We think true happiness and satisfaction are found in changing our circumstances, even when we actually have the kinds of lives others only dream of having.

What if God is writing a better story for your life—a story that is unfolding right in front of you *today*? Your life is not “out there” or coming “someday,” but it's happening right here, right now.

Hebrews 12:1 says God has marked a race for us to run, but we get exhausted from chasing the lives of people around us. We're running endless laps around a track trying to keep up with people who had different starting points. Plus, you may be training for the Boston Marathon when your race is only a 5K, a trail run, or heck, even a nice jog on the beach. Not to mention, we have our own

junk—that is, our sin—weighing us down and making us want to numb out.

The race of life is not actually a competition. We're not stacked up against each other. You aren't losing, and the person running their race near you isn't winning. The race features runners going in different directions, at different paces, facing different hurdles along the way. But the finish line is the same: eternity with Jesus. When we take our eyes off him to focus on the racers around us, we can trip, get hurt, or throw ourselves off course.

But when we focus on what God has given us, we find a better way to live—a way to stop endlessly striving to catch up.

What if we learned to love where we live without wishing we were somewhere else?

What if we embraced our talents and found delight in the things we do for work and fun instead of looking at what everyone else is doing online?

What if we built real, authentic communities with the people in front of us instead of feeling left out?

What if we found confidence in the races God marked for us instead of trying to chase different ones?

It's possible. More than that, I think it's urgent because we have an enemy—the devil—and that enemy would love nothing more than to slow you down, sideline you, or convince you to quit. You have a part to play in building the kingdom of God, but the devil knows it's really hard for you to do your part if you're distracted and feeling behind.

**When we focus on what  
God has given us, we find  
a better way to live.**

## DON'T MISS YOUR LIFE

Often I tell people, “I almost missed my life.” God has used a series of small decisions to drastically change the plans I had for myself, which we will talk more about later. When I get caught in the trap of trying to keep up, I remind myself that I could’ve missed so much. And I don’t want either of us to miss a thing.

I can’t promise you’ll never feel behind again after finishing this book. And this book won’t show you how to get ahead, or help you get every single thing you want out of life.

But if you stick it out, I can promise you’ll start to see your life differently.

You’ll see how the place right in front of you has more to offer than you give it credit for. God has a great purpose for you, where you are, and I want to help you live it out.

Right here in the middle of the messy and mundane, something bigger is at play.

Your life matters.

Right now. Today. Not tomorrow. Not someday. Not when you get to another season or destination. And I don’t want you to miss it.

So, are you ready?

Let’s do this.



## CHAPTER I

# Will I Ever Catch Up?

OCTOBER 2019

Fast-forward several months from crying at the popcorn ceiling, and I found myself unexpectedly moving to Charlotte, North Carolina—a city I'd never visited and where I knew no one.

I had recently quit my job and wasn't 100 percent sure what my next step would be. But a few weeks after quitting, I was offered a new position that seemed like the perfect fit, the type of job I hadn't known existed until I read the description. Shortly after accepting the job, I packed up my entire life, drove for nine hours, and arrived in Charlotte on a Friday afternoon. Then I started my first day of work on Monday morning.

My worries about being behind suddenly seemed to fade away. I had gotten my dream job and left my hometown, so the possibilities of what could happen felt endless. Life started to go in the direction I had wanted it to for so long; my hopes were high.

Shortly after I settled into my new city, my friend Madi bought a house and decided to renovate it. This was *very* on-brand for her because she is always down for an adventure. She also asked me to move in, and because I love being the sidekick to my friends' dreams, I thought that sounded like a great idea. I even offered to help her with some of the house projects before I moved in.

Two twentysomething women armed with some power tools and YouTube? I'll let you imagine how that went.

One of the first projects we tackled together was taking out the popcorn ceiling in the living room. Finally! A house without a popcorn ceiling. To me, that was a sign from heaven above; ripping out the popcorn ceiling represented upward mobility.

The days of crying at an ugly, out-of-date ceiling were over. No more feeling like I was behind.

However, we were a little overambitious with our execution and basically destroyed the drywall. We had to rip out the entire ceiling and get help putting in a new one...twice. That was the end of my DIY house endeavors.

Once we replaced the ceiling, life in our little house settled down. Then about nine months after the move to Charlotte, the newness of the job and the city wore off—and I found myself, once again, staring at a popcorn-less ceiling this time, tears streaming down my face wondering why my change of circumstances hadn't changed my heart.

Wasn't this what I had wanted all along?

So many prayers had been answered. Work was going well. I'd finally found a community in a city where I hadn't known anyone. Sure, I was on roommates 16 and 17 (and *really* hoped I wouldn't make it to 20). But overall, life seemed to be moving in the direction of my hopes.

So why wasn't it enough?

## THE REALITY OF STARTING OVER

Leading up to that moment, I had wrestled a lot with God. Though the move to Charlotte provided so many things I'd wanted for so long, it also revealed all the faulty beliefs I had about myself and God. What I thought was a solid foundation of faith beneath me actually had a lot of cracks. I had come to believe certain things

about God based on how my life was going, which made me think I had to earn his love or make up for lost time. And I didn't know how to identify those lies, let alone know how to start fixing them.

I remember when Madi and I looked up after three straight days of scraping the ceiling, we knew something didn't look right. Instead of a smooth surface that simply needed a fresh coat of paint, we saw dented sections of peeling drywall. We Googled repair options and even called our dads to ask what we should do next.

By then, the only way to fix it was to tear the whole ceiling down.

We were so defeated. We thought we'd followed the steps. The job had seemed so simple at first, though it had taken a lot of time. Surely there had to be a way to salvage it.

But sometimes the only way to fix something is to start over.

My move to Charlotte had been a fresh start. But once I got there, I still felt like I was constantly trying to catch up. I hustled for friendships, trying to create a quick sense of home, but my efforts were exhausting.

The people I met in Charlotte were becoming dear friends, but I still didn't feel completely emotionally safe and known—not because my friends didn't create space for me, but because I was scared. For a long time, I didn't know what I was so afraid of. But as I processed my situation with some wise mentors, I realized I had *many* fears. Of rejection. Of being too much. Of needing more than friends could give.

**Sometimes the only way to fix  
something is to start over.**

On top of that, I was still the new girl. A lot of the friendships in my social group existed before my arrival. Everyone else seemed settled and comfortable, and since most of my friends were married or getting married, they didn't seem to need me in the same way I felt I needed them. They already had built-in best friends and roommates.

Even though I loved my new job and thought I was good at it, I felt like an imposter sometimes. I deeply feared that my weaknesses would eventually show, at which point I would no longer be seen as capable. Or I worried someone better than me would come along, meaning I would no longer be needed. I was working alongside really talented women who had been doing our job longer and were clearly better at it than me.

Even deeper, anxiety lurked under the surface, saying maybe God wasn't who he said he was. I knew the Bible says he is compassionate and kind (Psalm 103:8), and that he has good plans for me (Jeremiah 29:11). But in all honesty, when I looked at my own life, none of that felt true—which made me wonder if everything I had given my life to wasn't real or worthwhile.

Lots of those staring-at-the-ceiling moments have occurred when things are slow and quiet. When the rush of the transition ends and the promised other side is no longer exciting. In the stillness, I have to face what I don't want to: the loneliness, the anxiety, the fear.

Starting over strips away the stuff we love and shows what we put our security in.

Before moving, so much of my identity had been wrapped up in where I lived, who my friends were, and what I did for work. I didn't even realize how much I placed my value in them until all of those things changed.

If you've ever seen a demolition, you know it's messy. Everything is covered in dust and broken into pieces. It doesn't look like beauty can come from it.

Finished products are much more appealing. The work is already done, and all you have to do is enjoy it. I'd much rather buy a brand-new house than one I'd need to renovate—mostly because I now know I'm not good at house projects.

## Starting over strips away the stuff we love and shows what we put our security in.

Madi can testify to how bad I was at remodeling. Not because I wasn't a team player or incapable of figuring it out, but because I really don't like trying things when I know I won't be good at them. I would rather pay an expert to take care of something than learn how to do it myself. Getting it right could take too long for me, or worse, maybe I could *never* do the job well enough. My oldest-child-rule-following-perfectionist self does not do well in those situations. One time I hung my own curtains, and I almost fell apart trying to get them even! To this day, I just don't look at them too closely because doing so will send me into a spiral.

We often want to fast-track and shortcut our way to where we want to be.

I wanted a new city, new friends, and a new job so I could make all my internal questions, feelings, and insecurities disappear. I had spent the early years of my twenties working on myself, and I was ready for the work to be done. Instead, I found myself more insecure and uncertain than before.

I felt exhausted. Hadn't I already been here? Wasn't I supposed to be further along?

## IS IT OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY?

Soon after the crying at the ceiling incident in Madi's new house, I went back to my hometown in Florida for the holidays. There, I sat around a bonfire with my old roommates, Brenna and Shelby, along with my three younger siblings, Patrick, Abby, and Micah.

We were in the backyard of my old house, the one where Brenna and Shelby still lived. We called it the Bae House because when we all moved in together in 2016, *bae* (meaning "before anyone else") was popular slang. Plus, we lived two blocks from the bay, so the name was also a play on words. I promise we were not as uncool as that all sounds.

The Bae House originated at 54 Little Canal, when Brenna lived there with her roommates Lucy and Ebie. Then Lucy got married and Ebie moved away, so Shelby and I moved in. A year later, we got kicked out because the owners sold the place, but we ended up moving right next door to 44 Little Canal. (I'll tell you more of that story later.)

That house was the last place that had really felt like my home. The three of us clocked a lot of life together over almost three years. Brenna and Shelby were my best friends, and in a way, they became my family. In my new city with my new roommates, I had been desperately trying to duplicate that situation.

Back to the night of the bonfire. It was around my birthday, so we played a game of Meghan's Birthday Questions. I can't take credit for the invention of this game, and since we don't remember where it first originated, now anyone who knows me just calls it Meghan's Birthday Questions. The game has become a tradition in almost all my friend groups.

I always ask the same three questions:

1. What was the high of your past year?

2. What was the low of your past year?
3. What are you hoping for next year? (Note: This answer can be realistic or totally wild.)

Naturally, my friends and siblings asked me these questions as we sat around the fire on that chilly November night. When asked about my low point, I expressed that I was still struggling with insecure and anxious feelings—that I didn’t feel any better now that life had settled a little more in Charlotte.

My youngest brother, Micah, was 22 at the time, and like any 22-year-old boy, he had unshakable confidence. He started sharing his “great wealth of wisdom” about being an adult with me, listing all the reasons why I shouldn’t feel insecure.

I laughed and said, “But I am way more insecure now than I was at 22.”

He looked shocked. “I’m sorry, did you say *more* insecure? Shouldn’t you be *less* insecure as you get older?”

“No,” I said. “I’m way more aware now of what I don’t know, so I was much more confident when I was younger. I wish I had the boldness I did then, but I don’t even recognize that girl anymore. And the uncertainty makes me way more insecure than I’ve ever been.”

No one seemed to know how to respond. Micah walked over and gave me a hug, which was sweet, because he didn’t know what else to say. Then I immediately wanted to take back my words. I had let too much out, and now my friends and siblings could see I was not okay.

Have you ever experienced this? On the outside you appear totally fine, but on the inside, you wish people would stop asking you questions so you can keep up the charade?

In that moment, I felt exposed. For the first time, I’d allowed myself to ask the question: *Am I okay?*

*No* was the answer. I was not.

Everyone around me seemed to be moving forward in life, while I was stuck in a cycle of perpetual disappointment.

As I reflect on that season, I now see I wasn't just trying to catch up to physical circumstances; there were spiritual and emotional ones too. Would I ever feel at home again? Or secure? Would I ever stop wrestling with God? And was God really paying attention to me?

That night when I was in bed alone, I cried because I felt he had abandoned me.

I realized that for the past few months, I'd thought he wasn't with me anymore. There were moments previously that he seemed so close and caring—but it had been so long since I last felt him. I wondered what had happened. And if God wasn't with me, then why did any of this matter?

Then I felt like a failure as a Christian. Aren't Christians supposed to feel God and hear him? They don't seem to question or doubt him when life stops going how they want it to. But there I was, questioning everything I thought I knew about him. And I felt really let down—disappointed that what I thought would make my life better actually wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO MANIPULATE YOUR HOPE

We often struggle to manage the tension between excitement and disappointment. On the one hand, we can downplay things to the point they will never be good enough. On the other, we can hype things up so much that almost any outcome lets us down. In an effort to manage our expectations, we do a lot of mental gymnastics.

Or we chase the high of an experience to the point of not enjoying what is right in front of us.

Think about the last time you were looking forward to

something. Maybe it was an event, a vacation, or even a first date. Then, once it was happening, did you find yourself counting down the minutes until it was over? Or dwelling on what you would do afterward? It's hard to enjoy the moment when your mind is already on the next thing.

My mom reminded me recently how I used to act when we went to Disney World as a family. Every morning when we woke up in the hotel, I would ask, "When are we going to the park?" And I couldn't sit still until we got to the park. Then, after only a little while at the park, I would start asking, "When are we going back to the hotel pool?"

You see where this is going...The cycle would continue most of the trip. (My poor parents.)

Decades later, I like to think I've grown in this area, and in a lot of ways I see progress. But I still find myself eager to get to the next thing, and once I get there, I'm either looking backward or trying to move ahead again.

In an effort to avoid pain and discomfort at all costs, I miss what's right in front of me. Good or bad.

I think the reason we struggle to sit still is less about avoiding pain, but more about being afraid of what would happen if we stop. If we aren't trying to move forward, will we get stuck? Will everyone else get ahead and leave us behind?

When God seems distant and disinterested in me, I try to take matters into my own hands, thinking it's up to me to keep my life going in the right direction.

But a few months ago, I realized how this was affecting me. Controlling my expectations and trying to avoid disappointment was no longer working.

I realized I'm constantly manipulating my own hope. I carefully try to convince myself and God that I'm in a better place than I am. Somewhere along the way I picked up the belief that if I'm truly content, then I'll get what I want.

Which, first off, is horrible theology, but we will get to that in chapter 6.

In reality, I steal happiness from today to better manage potential sadness for tomorrow.

Whether it's a new guy I'm going on dates with, a potential new opportunity at work, or something else I secretly want to work out, I put on a front that says, "It probably won't happen anyway."

*Don't let them see you get too excited, or you'll be embarrassed when you have to go back and tell them later it didn't work out.*

*Being hopeful feels a little naïve, and I'm too mature for that.*

*I won't get caught off guard because I'm realistic and knew this was going to happen anyway.*

Maybe you've picked up this tendency too: constantly using mental gymnastics to convince yourself, God, and everyone else that you are more okay than you are, and that the thing you long for or circumstance you want to change isn't bothering you all that much.

Deep down, you're not fine at all. In fact, you are afraid your desire for something is the reason God is withholding it from you.

Friend, I know firsthand how utterly exhausting that way of living and thinking is.

Something has to give.

In trying to keep ourselves from getting hurt or let down, we actually avoid experiencing the life right in front of us—a life that is full of really good things.

Plus, acting like we don't want something doesn't land us any less hurt in the end. And worse? We're only bracing for *potential* disappointment, not *guaranteed* disappointment. Despite my own tendency to be cynical, sometimes things actually can, and do, work out.

## **In trying to keep ourselves from getting hurt or let down, we actually avoid experiencing the life right in front of us.**

As I think about Micah asking me why I'm more insecure now that I'm older, I can't help but notice I'm also more cynical. Jaded, even. In one short decade, I've let my circumstances tell me a story about God that is not true. The childlikeness of the early days of following Jesus has worn off. I've started living like I believe God stays at a distance and won't come closer unless I try harder to be a "good Christian." I've adopted the false belief that my actions always come with a lesson he wants me to learn. I've assumed God isn't really interested in a relationship with me—and that the only thing he wants from me is obedience.

But the truth of the gospel means none of those assumptions are true. In fact, the opposite is true: He loved me, and you, enough to send his Son, Jesus, to die for us. (If you have questions about the gospel, or if you don't yet have a relationship with Jesus, you can read the section called "How to Know Jesus Personally" on page 199.)

I'm tired of my made-up story that puts limits on God's love and purpose for me.

I want to be someone marked by hope, who has faith in God before things work out. And even when they don't turn out the way I want them to, I still want to trust God.

I want you to be marked by hope too.

## HOW TO START RESTORING HOPE

Renovations are necessary for rebuilding and restoring. But renovations start with demolitions.

When I spend time in our basement, I rarely think about the work, sweat, and dust, or about the days I woke up with a stiff neck after hours spent scraping off the popcorn ceiling. No one who comes over acknowledges the corners of that ceiling that need a little touch-up paint. They never ask about the dimmer lights we installed. Even I forget what it looked like before.

Then, every once in a while, I remember.

I remember there used to be a popcorn ceiling in that room. I remember how pointless the scraping felt the moment we realized we had to tear it out. And when we failed to install new drywall ourselves and had to rip it out again. And how Madi's dad came to help.

**Renovations are necessary for  
rebuilding and restoring. But  
renovations start with demolitions.**

Regardless of the time and effort invested, we eventually had a new ceiling.

So, I'm going to try a little experiment: Instead of trying to act like I'm not hopeful, I think I'm going to try to just be excited?

Is that idea as silly as it sounds? To me, it's a little scary. I haven't exactly handled disappointment well in the past. And sometimes I wonder if the next time I feel like God let me down if I'll be able to recover.

But maybe it doesn't have to be that way.

The reality is, we still have hope whether we want to admit it or not. It's how we decide to express that hope that shows what we believe.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).

Hope is something hardwired in us by God.

To be joyful in hope (Romans 12:12), that hoping in him renews our strength (Isaiah 40:31) and in hoping we won't be put to shame (Romans 5:5). While my past hurts and heartbreaks make me want to protect myself, I know I'll miss so much if I don't let myself feel hopeful. Furthermore, the world is messed up enough—so why not try to enjoy the days when we can actually feel happy?

## Hope is something hardwired in us by God.

We spend a lot of time robbing ourselves of the joy of looking forward to something. Personally, I've decided I'm done with that.

What about you? Are you as tired as I am of living this way?

Even as I write this chapter, I'm really excited about some things on the horizon. And I'm scared to even admit that. There's always a chance they could all go horribly wrong, and I could regret ever writing this part of the book.

But something tells me hope is worth a shot. That on the other side of living and thinking this way, I'll find even more of God and the abundant life he wants to offer me.

I wonder what would it look like to actually live a year where I wasn't trying to manipulate my hopes?

Would anything about my life look different? Would I feel any better?

Would I actually get to experience the good gifts God has tucked into each day?

Would days of happiness outnumber days of disappointment?

Would I learn to love the life I have instead of wishing for another one?

Can I get my hopes up?

To be honest, hope rarely feels like enough.

But there is only one way to find out, and as we walk through this journey together, I'll do my best to try.

Maybe we can start there: looking at the parts of our lives that need a little rebuilding and restoring. Acknowledging the moments when we struggle to believe God is with us. Admitting we are not okay.

While the process of learning to not manipulate our hope can feel messy, I think that process helps us lay groundwork for some really good things. It may take a few attempts, but like ripping out the popcorn ceiling, this step may be the start of a good story someday.