

H O P E

LIVING
CONFIDENTLY
IN GOD

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

JOHN CROTTS

My friend John Crotts is a kind, caring, winsome, loving pastor. His biblical skill and pastoral gifts are demonstrated in this thirty-one-day devotional on hope. John speaks to many who may be broken, hopeless, and despairing. Whether for use in one's personal devotions, in a small group, or even as a counseling tool, this book has so much to commend it. John has excelled in this devotional format, turning the angles of biblical hope like a diamond, bringing forth the true hope we have in Jesus and his hope-giving Word.

—**Brian Borgman**, Founding Pastor, Grace Community Church, Minden, Nevada; Author, *Feelings and Faith* and *An Exile's Guide to Walking with God*

John Crotts is a faithful pastor and a skilled expositor. Both are well reflected in this biblical and accessible thirty-one-day devotional book, *Hope: Living Confidently in God*. John carefully chooses key passages on this topic and pastorally applies them to highlight the hope of the gospel and the confidence that knowing Christ brings to our lives. The best part is how John's personal faith runs as a thread throughout the whole book, bringing real and authentic wisdom and encouragement to the life of any Christian who seeks to be reminded afresh of the unshakeable hope Christ provides in a broken world. I commend this book and its author.

—**Brian Croft**, Founder and Executive Director, Practical Shepherding; Senior Fellow, Mathena Center for Church Revitalization, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Hurting believers often lack hope, and their problems are typically compounded by the fact that they are not consistently spending time in God's Word. John Crotts's thirty-one-day devotional does a wonderful job of addressing both needs. Through his decades of pastoral experience, he understands the despair into which God's people often fall. He faithfully applies God's Word to the hurting

soul, often drawing from passages profound insights that would not occur to most of us as remedies for hopelessness. This devotional will get the brother or sister who needs hope back into the Word on a daily basis through bite-sized portions.

—**Jim Newheiser**, Director of the Christian Counseling Program, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte; Executive Director, The Institute for Biblical Counseling & Discipleship

John Crotts is my pastor, and he has written several books, and I have read them all. Two of his books have been my favorites, but now I have to add a third: *Hope*. Two words come to mind about this book: *sweet* and *comforting*. I highly recommend this book, as you will draw closer to God, and you will love it.

—**Martha Peace**, Certified Biblical Counselor; Author, *The Excellent Wife*

It has been said that without hope a person will fail to persevere. John has written what I'd like to call "spiritual B₁₂ shots of hope." We all need hope—some more than others, depending on what is going on in life. I encourage readers of this great book to take their own "daily dose" of hope in God and his promises and to spread it around.

—**Stuart W. Scott**, Professor of Biblical Counseling, Graduate Program of The Master's University

"Hope begins with thinking right thoughts about God." This line from *Hope* summarizes the foundational truths about hope from God's Word found in these pages. Hope is essential to a well-lived life, and it is essential to biblical counseling. You cannot care for someone's soul without offering them hope. *Hope* is a wonderful companion, a co-counselor, to take with you into any counseling situation.

—**Curtis Solomon**, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition

H O P E

31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

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DEEPAK REJU

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P U B L I S H I N G

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To Joshua and Charissa Koh.
May the Lord give you a family filled with hope!

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How to Nourish Your Soul

A LITTLE BIT every day can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, every night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. But we try to do this most every night.

Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short. Just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your starving soul. Read it on the subway or the bus on the way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it a part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your daily life. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because John speaks directly to you, the reader. Each devotional contains at least one reflection question and practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. The Bible is overflowing with hope because real hope is found in God and in his gospel news about his beloved Son, Jesus. Christ died for your sins and will return again one day to bring you back with him to the Father. This hope is gritty and long-lasting. It gets you out of bed in the morning, gives you genuine joy and contentment, and helps you to weather the worst storms. It inspires worship every day of the week, not just on Sundays. And it won't let you down.

Are you ready for something like this? You probably need it just as much as I do.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. It will help to remind you of God's goodness and power and promises, both in good seasons and in bad. So work through it this coming month and then come back to it a year from now to remind yourself about what God and the gospel teach us about hope.

This devotional starts you on a wonderful journey toward hope. If, after reading and rereading it, you want more gospel-rich resources about hope, John has listed several at the end of the book. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

Introduction

IF YOU HOLD a penny right up to your eye, it appears huge—it is all you can see. In the same way, the problems in front of you are often painfully magnified, dominating your vision. An unexpected loss of income, a relationship that feels ruined, a doctor saying “cancer,” the feeling that you are at the bottom of a well of sinful choices and their devastating consequences—all can overload your perspective. How can you think of anything else?

When you take that penny away from your eyes, though, perspective returns. It is still every bit a penny, but lying on the table, the penny doesn't seem so enormous. Having a hopeful perspective is a vital ingredient for enduring even the hardest problems of life with joy. As you lower the trial from right before your eyes, what do you now see? You see God. You see his love, his power, his plan, his faithfulness, his complete control. As right views of God fill your field of vision, something will seem different. You have hope.

What Is Hope?

Hope is confidence for a better future. If a person doesn't expect a better outcome in the future, they become stuck in present bleakness. The farmer works hard on his rugged land in hope of some kind of future harvest. If he didn't assume a harvest, there would be no need for him to fight the weeds.

Sadly, many people try to function with an optimistic attitude about the future without any real basis for their good expectations. Against a world filled with hard things, those desperate for hope clasp at any positive platitude. If your self-made reasons for hope are insufficient to survive the circumstance, your hope is

really wishful thinking. No amount of wishing will enable you to swim across the sea.

Real, biblical hope is different. The resources for your expectations are not in yourself but in God. Because God is infinite in all of his attributes, those who trust in him have solid assurance of his goodness toward them for the future. Christian hope is confident. All the faith you rightly have in God as he is revealed in the Bible is aimed at your future. This future-oriented faith is true hope, and it will never fail.

The God of hope has unlimited power. As the angel Gabriel declared to Mary that she, a virgin, would become pregnant with the Son of God, he said, “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). There is no problem that is too big for God to get a person through. God can change an entire nation in a day; he can always strengthen you.

The God of hope also has clear purposes and a big plan. He is working everything according to the counsel of his will (see Eph. 1:11). His sovereign plan and his providential control of the outworking of his plan extend to the very details of your life. That means that your suffering is never meaningless. God is at work. We can’t always know all that God is doing, but we can be certain that he is working in your trial (see Rom. 8:28). If we knew all that he was accomplishing, we would bow before him in awe of his plan.

The God of hope has blessed us with wonderful promises to help us to hope. His promises reveal his character and his heart. God is true and unchanging; therefore, every word he has given us in the Bible is reliable. His promises give us confidence that he is with us and that he will always give us grace to endure the trial (see 1 Cor. 10:13). The God of hope truly cares for his people. He is not like a supercomputer calculating your problems and spitting out solutions. God loves you. God is working in and around your difficult life situations in personal ways.

Facing your problems with biblical hope does not guarantee

that you will see positive outcomes on all of your trials. But God will help you in your trials. He may not change your outward circumstances, but he will use his truth to lift your heart. Your hope-filled heart will help you to honor him and to endure through every trial. Whatever God doesn't fix in this short life will be more than made up for through all eternity.

The Purpose of This Book

This devotional is not a Bible study about hope. Instead, each day brings you a different encouragement from Scripture designed to inspire you to hope. There are all kinds of problems that you will face in this life—all of them need hope. The Bible contains all kinds of ways that God inspires us to hope in him—direct statements, psalms sung in troubled times, promises, and even familiar stories. Don't rush past any of the meditations. Take time to reflect upon the Scriptures and to put into practice the practical suggestions as you are able. Consider how each meditation could inspire more hope in you. Ask the Lord to fill your heart with hope. God will help you.

Each day you will see a different facet of the diamond of God's character. It is my prayer that the fresh rays of hope that you receive from God's Word in the next thirty-one days will become a bright, shining beam of hope radiating from your heart.

THE BEGINNING
OF HOPE

DAY 1

Where Hope Begins

According to [God's] great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3–5)

WHAT WORDS DO you associate with your salvation?

Christians usually associate salvation from God's judgment with the word *faith*. After all, the Bible says you can never earn salvation through good works: salvation is received by faith alone. The Lord Jesus has done the work. He lived righteously. He died in the place of sinners on the cross. He rose from the dead. Jesus calls people to stop trusting their own righteousness and to put their faith in him alone. That is what it means to be a Christian.

But *hope* is also a wonderful salvation word.

People usually use the word *hope* to mean an optimistic or positive wish for the future. Sometimes the biblical writers use *hope* in this way, like when Paul says to Timothy, "I hope to come to you soon" (1 Tim. 3:14). In that situation, Paul didn't know what God had planned and wished for a speedy visit to his friend.

For a non-Christian, wishful hope is the best they can have. A Christian has a far more powerful hope, however: the hope that comes through salvation. Because Jesus rose from the dead, your trust in him is not in vain. He proved the reality of the world to come. When he brings you to heaven, your hopes will be filled with substance. You may never receive an earthly inheritance, but you will receive a heavenly inheritance in glory. It will never perish, become defiled, or fade away. You will never get such assurances from earthly treasures. You can be confident about your

heavenly inheritance because God is personally guarding it until you receive it.

Although you deserve God's punishment because of your sinful attitudes and actions, God has given you mercy—*great mercy*, in fact. In that great mercy he has caused you to be *born again*, to come to life spiritually. As your spiritual eyes open, you begin to see through lenses of hope—*dynamic living hope*. When God changes you from a rebellious creature into an adopted son, you can have confidence, even certainty, that God will accomplish good plans in your life. You can have confident expectations of the future, the very meaning of hope.

Because of your salvation, you have a solid foundation for hope.

Reflect: In the Roman world, the apostle Paul frequently saw soldiers in armor. Once he illustrated spiritual warfare by calling Christians to use “for a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). In both physical and spiritual battle, protection for the head is essential. What are some ways your salvation hope straps on like a secure helmet for protection in the battles you face?

Act: Write 1 Peter 1:3–5 on an index card and place it on your bathroom mirror. Read it over every morning for these thirty-one days to impress its truth on your heart.

DAY 2

The Spiritual Connection between Faith and Hope

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)

THE WORD *HOPE* is popularly used for something good a person wishes for in the future. *Faith* is belief or trust in a person, idea, or thing. The Bible, however, fills both of these words with greater significance.

As we saw yesterday, the gospel says that sinners are declared righteous by faith alone in Christ alone. Your faith is only as good as its object—our Savior, Jesus. Your sins had separated you from your perfect Creator. You were a condemned criminal before a judge. You couldn't do enough good deeds to earn God's favor. But Jesus offered to take the punishment you deserve. When you trust in Christ, you receive him and his gift of mercy: "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Faith in Christ is more than just mentally believing a series of facts about him. Faith is *confidence* in the Lord Jesus Christ—who he is and what he has done—and all that the Bible says about him. Although you haven't seen him, you have conviction that he is the Lord who rose from the dead.

Hope is future-oriented faith. Hope, like faith, is confidence in the Lord Jesus and all that the Bible says about him, but it is confidence aimed at the future. Jesus will come again as he promised. He will rescue his people and judge the world. He will bring this world back to life. He will bring heaven to earth, and Christians will be with the Lord forever. His promises are reliable. The final salvation of believers is sure and glorious.

Biblical *hope* is more than wishful thinking. Biblical hope is an assured expectation that everything God has promised will come to pass. God cannot lie. All that the Bible says is true, and the future its words describe is as certain as if it had already happened.

People all around us use the words *faith* and *hope*, but only those who believe the Bible understand the true weight of these precious words.

Reflect: Does your understanding of hope match the popular meaning of wishing for future good or the biblical understanding of confident expectations of the future based upon God’s character and promises?

Reflect: The apostle Paul frequently thanks God for virtues manifested in Christians he knows. One of those virtues is hope. “We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:2–3). Who models this kind of Christian hope in your life? How has that person’s hope encouraged you? Can you give thanks to God for them?

Act: If you don’t have the kind of faith and hope the Bible talks about, ask God to give them to you.

JESUS IS YOUR HOPE