

AN INVITATION TO THE UNEXPECTED

To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect.

—OSCAR WILDE

For my fiftieth birthday, Nick gave me the greatest gift ever. He invited 150 of our dearest friends to a huge celebration he'd planned for a year. It was a dinner cruise with wonderful food, dancing, a beautiful cake, and lots of laughs.

It was one of the most amazing nights of my life. And, as I'd find out later that evening, it would also become one of the saddest nights of my life.

While I was on the boat dancing Zorba the Greek with all my friends, I missed multiple phone calls from my brother Andrew. I discovered them on the drive home, along with an unexpected text: "Mum is gone."

In a matter of minutes, I went from soaking in the memories of the happiest night imaginable to feeling utterly heartbroken. I was whiplashed by the shock of it all.

I had just spoken with my mother earlier in the day, when my other brother, George, had helped her FaceTime with me. Although she had been ill for some time, I thought we had at

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least a few more months. I had even told her I would call after the party, as I expected to give her a full report on all the fun.

I'll always cherish the last memory I have of her—looking at her face, seeing her sweet smile, and hearing her say, “I love you.”

Such an unexpected gift right before an unexpected loss.

It's strange how life can be that way—so full of surprises, both good and bad, and sometimes all in the same day. We can go from cleaning up after a birthday party to planning a funeral. From hearing a shocking diagnosis to welcoming our first grandchild. From a layoff notice at lunch to a marriage proposal at dinner. From an unexpected car repair one day to a raise and promotion the next. From planning a vacation to losing everything in a hurricane.

It seems the unexpected is one of the mysteries of life—something we have no control over but are guaranteed to experience every single day.

Of course, we don't usually mind the unexpected when it's happy or inconsequential. But when the unexpected strikes fear in our hearts or is deeply painful—like losing someone we cherish—it can throw us into such a devastated state that we withdraw or shut down, unable to move forward in . . .

- Our marriage
- A friendship
- Our health
- Our career
- Our faith

Whiplashed and then immobilized by something we never expected, we end up stuck in a place we never wanted to be. Stuck in a place where our world shrinks and we hide inside of

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it, living a story far smaller than God intends. Forfeiting the future that could have been. The destiny we were born to live.

We've all been there, tempted to pull back and hide when we were wounded, disappointed, or disillusioned. When we faced failure or endured another heartache. When we suffered a loss that was more than we felt we could bear. When we made promises to ourselves that we'd never let such pain happen to us again. But we can't keep those kinds of promises. Not if we want to step into all of *God's* promises. Not if we want to live with all the passion he placed inside of us. Not if we want to fulfill the purpose and destiny he has for us.

No.

We cannot shrink back in fear and go forward in faith at the same time. We cannot settle for our *less* and pursue his *more* at the same time. It's just not possible.

What *is* possible is accepting his gracious invitation to trust him more in the face of our pain. To move into a deeper intimacy with him and let him heal our hearts. To develop relentless faith so that the next time life throws us a curve ball—which life most certainly will—we are able to bat it out of the park and still live the adventure he's planned for us. And maybe we'll even live a version of the adventure that's beyond what we could ever have hoped or imagined—all because of the unexpected that interrupted our lives in the first place.

I believe with all my heart that it's possible for every Christian to learn how to live with a faith so confident in God, it can't be shaken—even when the ground underneath is giving way. That's what Abraham did. God extended to him the same invitation he extends to us—to trust with all his heart—and Abraham said yes, even though he had no idea where his yes would lead. He willingly stepped into the unexpected without knowing

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where he was going, who he would meet, or what it might cost. He didn't know any of the pain that might lie ahead, but he knew God would be with him. He knew God would guide him, protect him, and provide for him—and he refused to be shaken:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, *even though he did not know where he was going.*

HEBREWS 11:8, emphasis added

Like Abraham, I know what it feels like to go forth not knowing where I'm going. To risk it all and trust God with an unknown future. Through the years of my Christian walk, I've gone from volunteering in a local youth ministry in my early twenties, to running a global anti-trafficking organization in twelve nations, to continuing to launch new initiatives into my fifties. I've gone from living in Australia where I started in ministry, married, and had children, to moving our ministry base to the United States. I have repeatedly stepped into unexpected places, only to find myself accomplishing unexpected ventures, and seeing God turn up in the most unexpected ways—all because I said yes every single time, even when I didn't have any idea where it would lead.

Since I surrendered my life fully to Jesus, he's been teaching me unshakeable faith. Relentless faith. Unwavering faith. Teaching me to trust him more every time he asks. Teaching me to embrace the unexpected. He's been cultivating in me the same kind of faith that propelled Abraham further into his destiny as the father of Isaac, and ultimately the father of many nations. The same kind of faith that led Abraham to trust God more, even in the face of sheer hopelessness:

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Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

ROMANS 4:18–21

When God gave Abraham such an outlandish and unexpected promise, he simply believed God’s promise—he risked hope against all rational hope. He didn’t deny the facts of his circumstances, but he refused to believe they were the whole truth because they did not account for God’s promise. He did not waver or doubt, and because of that, his faith grew even stronger. When, at last, Isaac was born, Abraham gave all the glory to God.

Imagine the difference we could make if we learned to face the unexpected in our lives as Abraham did. If we learned to do the unexpected while facing the unexpected. What if we believed instead of feared in the face of the unknown? What if we courageously moved through loss and disappointment, believing God has purpose for it on the other side? What if we got up every day believing God for the best, knowing we might possibly encounter the worst?

I believe we can live this expectantly—this hopefully, this freely, this faith-filled—in the face of *everything* that comes our way. Even the unexpected.

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When I planned this book, I didn't realize how timely it would be. How on point it would be for all we're grappling with in the world today. From the day I reviewed the outline with our publisher until the day it went to press, the news reports have been filled with the unexpected, with shocking events that are hard to understand and can sometimes shake our faith:

- An active shooter at a school, church, or concert
- A car racing down a sidewalk intentionally targeting pedestrians—not just in one city, but in multiple cities
- History-making hurricanes devastating millions of lives
- A demonstration intended to unite that only divides
- Another suicide bomber in a crowded market or arena
- A government leader's disappointing choices
- The passing of laws contradicting our values or beliefs
- A UNESCO World Heritage site left in ruins
- Another genocide

Some days these events seem so far away, and other days they hit way too close to home. In all these situations, God wants us to be faith-filled believers shining the light of Christ in a dark world. He wants us to learn how to walk with confidence through every unexpected challenge life throws our way—not only so we can be a powerful testimony to others, but also so we can develop a more intimate relationship with him ourselves.

When we went back to Australia for my mum's funeral, I stood at her graveside service watching her casket being lowered into the ground, and all I could think was, *I'm next*. It wasn't a depressing or morbid thought. It was just a realization of the natural order of life. Typically, you first bury your

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grandparents, then your parents, and then, you're the next generation to go. That thought stayed with me for days, and it made me more determined than ever to make my life count. To be sure I was doing all that God had called me to do. To lead as many souls to Jesus as I possibly can. It made me resolute in my commitment to Christ, to walk by faith, and to embrace the unexpected. Even during the season of writing this book, God challenged me again, inviting me to let him heal a wound so deep I didn't know it was there.

Through that tender story, other stories from my life, as well as those of dear friends, I'll share what I've learned about how to walk by faith in hopes that you might better understand how fear attacks and how you can overcome its debilitating effects—no matter how heartbreaking the unexpected is. Whether . . .

- A life-threatening diagnosis
- A cutting relational wound
- Deepening disappointment
- A tidal wave of relentless losses
- A purposeless season of life
- A hidden hurt yet to be healed

On the pages ahead, I can't wait to introduce you to my friends, Adrian and Jayne, Amanda and LoriAnn, Kylie and Laura. They are ordinary people doing extraordinary things because, when faced with the unexpected, they accepted God's invitation to trust him more and walk in greater faith. They are real people who were willing to be vulnerable, to let me share their stories, to help you to keep moving forward—from where you are to where God wants you to go.

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I have no doubt this book is in your hands because God has a life of adventure planned for you. I know he created you on purpose, for a purpose—and he never wants fear *of* the unexpected or *from* the unexpected to hold you back. So, as you read this book, as you allow the Holy Spirit to light your path, let's go together. Let's leave fear behind, move forward in faith, and embrace the adventure of the unexpected.

Love,
Christine

Chapter One

WHEN THE UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTS

Living Expectantly



True stability results when presumed order and presumed disorder are balanced. A truly stable system expects the unexpected, is prepared to be disrupted, waits to be transformed.

TOM ROBBINS

Chris, you have cancer.”

Not quite the words I was expecting to hear as I was unpacking, having arrived in Sydney just two hours earlier. Nick and I, along with our girls, Catherine and Sophia, were in town to attend the annual weeklong worship conference at Hillsong Church—always the highlight of our year, where we came to be refreshed and receive direction from God. It was my twenty-fifth year to attend, and I felt such a sense of expectancy. I knew God had something significant for me.

We had flown fourteen hours from LA where we had moved five years before in order to expand the work of A21, our global anti-trafficking organization. We loved living in the US, *and* we loved coming home.

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As I listened to my doctor calling from the US, time seemed to stand still, as though it was giving my mind a chance to catch up to what I was hearing. I looked out the window past the boats sailing in Darling Harbour and focused on the Anzac Bridge. So much had happened in a week's time.

Just the Wednesday before, I had been in Dallas filming a live TV special about overcoming the pain of the past and moving into one's future. I love seeing people set free from the bondage and strongholds that keep them enslaved to the pain of their past. I've never lost touch with how Jesus set me free, and I have spent three decades helping others find that same freedom. God had always been faithful to use his Word to heal before, and he had been faithful again. I was blessed to hear about the number of people who responded to the teaching, calling in for prayer and support that night after the show.

Saying goodbye to the crew and thanking them for their part in so many lives being touched, I noticed that my throat was sore and that I sounded hoarse—but I didn't think too much about it as I headed to my hotel. After all, I had talked all day. And most of the evening. I talk for a living. I talk for pleasure. I talk to sort things out in my head. I'm Greek—and a woman. Talking is part of my DNA. In short, I never stop talking. So I logically chalked up my sore throat to that day's enthusiasm and looked forward to a good night's sleep.

But when I woke up Thursday morning, I could barely lift my head off the pillow. My head hurt so badly and I was so sick—something I rarely experience. As I became more awake, I knew that this wasn't normal. I could feel something hanging down the back of my throat on the left side. I could feel a tiny lump on the right. And I had this uneasy feeling that something was wrong, very wrong.

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I called Nick, who was on the other side of the world in Madagascar on a mission trip, to tell him my concerns. After listening to me describe my symptoms, he prayed for me and reassured me that it would all be okay and that he'd be home in just a few days. Then, I headed back to LA to speak at a church's women's conference and their weekend services.

GOD WAS WITH ME

I know the grace of God carried me through Saturday and Sunday as I'd never felt that ill in all my years of ministry. When Nick got home on Sunday afternoon, I was so relieved. I knew I needed to see a doctor, but because I'd never needed one in the five years that I'd lived in the States, we didn't know who to call. As evening approached, we discussed our options: waiting to see my physician in Australia, since we were heading there the next week, or going to an urgent care center that night. We decided first to go for a walk to talk further and pray. We needed clear direction.

Despite my uneasiness and how I felt, I could sense that God was with me. Walking in the park, we crossed paths with a dear friend. As we stopped to say hello, we began talking, and I shared what I was experiencing. He highly recommended his doctor whose office was close by, and since Nick and I had been asking God for direction, we believed this was his answer. We contacted the doctor, and surprisingly, she agreed to see me the next morning—even though she wasn't taking new clients and had a packed schedule. God was taking care of me, and I knew it.

As soon as the doctor examined me, she ordered blood work, referred me to an ENT, and scheduled a series of tests—all

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fast-tracked within the next three days since I had to leave for Sydney Wednesday night. When I met with the ENT, he was greatly concerned about the nodules that had formed on my vocal cords. He felt they were so serious that he explicitly told me to speak very little in the coming weeks. “Minimally,” he had said, and then he added, “and whatever you do, don’t sing.”

He had no idea that I was headed to the annual Hillsong Worship Conference. I nodded my head, because I knew he was giving me sound medical counsel, but deep inside, I found it all so humorous and surreal. Imagine the most talkative woman you know being told not to talk or sing while attending a worship conference. *Are you kidding me?*

So yes, I had been expecting the call from my doctor, but I wasn’t expecting her to say cancer—a word that had the power to trigger so many painful memories.

THE SAME NEWS, THE SAME CITY

The C Word.

We’ve all known someone.

I knew someone. He was the first man I had ever loved. I was just eighteen when my mum told me, “Christina, your father has cancer.” She had said it just as honestly and bluntly then as my doctor was saying it now. I didn’t want to believe it about him then, just like I didn’t want to believe it about me now. The emotions of my past were compounding those of my present, and though I didn’t want to relive what I had been through thirty years before, I couldn’t stop the flashbacks.

I had witnessed firsthand how cancer—not to mention chemo and radiation therapy—consumes a healthy body.

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I watched my dad go from a strong, independent man to a weak, frail one. I watched his beautiful, thick black hair fall out of his head. I watched his strong frame slowly diminish to skin and bones. When he could no longer drive, I drove him to his appointments. I sat in waiting rooms while he was in surgery.

I learned what a financial burden endless treatments can be.

And I experienced the suffocating effect of fear. I saw my mother feel helpless, hopeless, afraid, and lost. I prayed desperate, fervent prayers that seemed to change nothing. I felt fear like never before as it gradually took up residence in our home and in our hearts. I had faith and hope that my dad would be healed. But I heard him being sick, ever so sick, always sick. And I saw what stalled hope could do to a family as our hearts sank low.

When we finally heard his doctor use the word *remission*, we thought we were in the clear. We were elated. It had been such a long time since we had any expectation of normal.

But then, just two weeks later, the unexpected happened. Again.

I raced home from work when Mum sent for me. The ambulance was parked outside our house, and a crowd of neighbors had gathered on our lawn. I walked in the front door to see my mum holding my dad's head in her lap. She had been helping him put on his shirt.

I've never been able to un-see that moment.

I've never been able to un-feel that shock and heartbreak.

I loved my dad dearly.

The grief that unfolded in the following months was devastating. I saw my distraught brothers try to process life without their hero. I saw my mum, who was normally a pillar

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of strength, become almost nonfunctional. She and my dad deeply loved each other, and I don't think she ever imagined life without him.

Everything changed when my dad died—including me. His death triggered a downward spiral in my life that I didn't know how to stop, because when you don't know how to process grief, you try to numb it. You will do anything, absolutely anything, to not *feel*—the loss, the pain, the heartache.

Life without my father has never stopped aching me.

He wasn't there to watch me walk across the stage and receive my college degree.

He didn't get to meet Nick.

He couldn't walk me down the aisle on my wedding day.

My daughters won't ever meet their grandfather.

I've never been able to call him and tell him that we rescued another girl through the work of A21.

I've never been able to hand him one of my books.

He's never heard me teach.

All because of cancer.

So, yes, I was very familiar with the word *cancer*—and with the fear and pain that it injects into the life of a family.

And now the doctor was speaking that word, not about an acquaintance, a friend, or someone on television, but about *me*. Me. A healthy, fit wife and mother of two beautiful girls. I was hearing the same news in the same city where I'd lived through it decades before, and buried my dad because of it.

Still staring at the bridge, I stopped recalling long enough to hear my doctor explain: "You actually have four separate conditions in that area: a growth on the left side of your throat, nodules on your vocal cords, a throat infection, and thyroid cancer."

SO UNEXPECTED

As I stood there trying to comprehend all that the doctor was saying, my heart wrenched as I thought of Nick and the girls. *What would this mean for our lives? Was the cancer isolated? Had it spread?*

I knew I wouldn't live forever—not here on earth—but this was so . . . unexpected.

And yet, if we stop to think about it, every day is filled with the unexpected, with the unanticipated. We make our to-do lists. We set out thinking our day will go according to plan. But it doesn't, because interruptions that we never saw coming invade our lives and usher in the unexpected. Some of those interruptions are small and harmless, like running into an old friend at lunch. And some are big and inconvenient, like having a flight canceled or rerouted. Some of them are happy, like receiving a surprise marriage proposal or a promotion. And some of them are heartbreaking, like getting a call that a dear friend has died or learning our spouse is having an affair. And some of them, some of them are just plain shocking, like when your doctor says, "Chris, you have cancer."

But as surprising as the unexpected is, we need to remember that our unexpected is never unexpected to God. God knew this day would come in my life, and he was already in this day waiting for me. Fear was trying to grip me like it naturally does when we receive any bad news, but I knew I couldn't let it overwhelm me.

And yet, I couldn't stop thinking about Nick and the girls. I didn't want my daughters to go through what I had gone through with my dad, and I didn't want them to grow up without a mother. *What about all the dreams Nick and I had for the future? What about the ministry and our team?*

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I knew I had to stop my mind from going too far. I knew enough to recognize this train of thought could speed quickly down its track and derail me into a dark place. I knew that I needed to be in faith—for all our sakes. Like many situations I'd been through before, I knew there was a choice that was still mine to make: *Would I walk in fear or faith?*

It was faith that had always propelled me forward through my circumstances in the past, so I chose faith in my present situation. That didn't mean, however, that the fear went away. It still tempted me, but I knew that being tempted with fear wasn't the same as giving into it—and not giving into it was the only way I could overcome its grip. So, even while I was processing so many thoughts in my head—about my dad, about Nick and the girls, about cancer, about the ministry and my future—in my heart I was falling into the arms of my heavenly Father. Deep down, I knew that I trusted God.

Time and time again, in big things and in small ones, I had learned to run *to* God and not *from* him. I had learned that whatever my situation, he was there with me. I had taken it to heart that God is good. God does good. God works all things together for my good,¹ and that *all things* really includes *all* things, even bad things that happen to good people, like what was happening to me now.

Cancer was definitely bad; certainly not good. Certainly not from God. I do not believe that God sends sickness, because there is no sickness in heaven or in God himself. The Word promises us that God gives us good and perfect gifts, because he is good—and no kind of cancer is a good or perfect gift.² Cancer, like all sickness, is a part of the curse. Because we live in a fallen world, bad things do happen to good people.

So, I had to find the strength to fight this fight of faith.³

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I had no desire to go straight home. I wanted to stay at the conference for the week to be in a faith-filled environment and to sing. It was going to be a week filled with praise and worship and the teaching of the Word of God, and I wanted to build myself up spiritually for what might be ahead medically.

“Leslie,” I began as I found my voice, “it’s okay. Cancer is not terminal. Life is terminal. I will live every second of every day that God has ordained for me to live on this earth, and then I will go home. The devil has no authority over my life. The blood of Jesus covers me, and he will take me home when he wants me.”

I could hear my voice growing stronger. I could feel my faith taking over. I could feel courage swelling higher. Only God could have given me such strength in that moment.

“I don’t know how I’m going home, but like most people, I imagine that death will be the doorway. I just don’t think it’s time yet. I’m not afraid of dying. That is inevitable, and I just refuse to allow the word *cancer* to grip me with fear.”

I’m sure all of that sounded strange to my doctor—especially since I’d only known her for four days. But I had to speak from my heart what I knew to be the truth—for my sake—whether it made sense to anyone else or not. I wasn’t denying reality, just its power to control me.

I knew that I couldn’t control the unexpected any more than I could stop an earthquake, tsunami, or hurricane. I had to say it because I believe in the goodness of God, even when I could feel fear trying to grip me. I knew there would be a journey ahead—whether short or long. Either way, I had to stay anchored to Jesus—the one in whom my hope relied, the one who held my future. I had to keep my faith alive. And I couldn’t let the memories of the past get entangled with my present.

“Tell me what we need to do,” I continued. “If I need to come home straight away, I will, but I am at a conference this week that is themed, ‘No Other Name,’ and I believe that there is a name that is higher than the name of cancer, and that is the name of Jesus. We are on a battlefield, not a playground. It’s time to go to war. You tell me what to do medically, and I will fight this spiritually, and whatever happens, Jesus will have the final victory.”

FEEDING FAITH, STARVING FEAR

Based on my doctor’s advice, I stayed. And against the ENT’s advice, I sang, but not out of foolishness. I just knew in my heart that I had to make God bigger in my mind than the news about cancer. I wanted to magnify him and lift him up. I knew that I had to put all my heart into the praise and worship, because it was as critical to my healing as anything the doctors might require in the coming weeks.

I knew I was in a battle and that the enemy never plays fair. He had come for my voice, to silence me—now and forever. But I had been through enough challenges throughout my life to understand that if I did some of the expected things in the unexpected moments—like put into practice biblical principles I had learned thus far in life—I could expect a better outcome. And I could keep the fear away.

So I did. I sang and praised and worshiped Jesus all week, and at the end of the week, I returned home to the States ready to face what lie ahead.

I also called on a few faithful and faith-filled friends whom I could trust to pray for me—friends I knew in the coming weeks

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would speak faith to me when I might not be strong enough to stand alone in the face of the fear. We're all human, and we all need prayer warriors who will be there when we need them.

I didn't share my condition with anyone else, because I've learned that if you talk to too many people, someone will inevitably want to tell you about their favorite aunt who died of the same kind of cancer you have. For some reason, people think those kinds of stories bless you. But for my faith to thrive, I knew I had to keep myself encamped in what I have come to call a "faith cocoon." It's when I proactively decide to stay diligent in the Word, listen continuously to worship music, and allow only faith-filled voices to speak into my life about a particular situation. So, at the moment, it was critical whom I trusted to fight this battle alongside me.

I stayed in the Word and found key verses to pray and believe—promises for healing, for a future. I kept them on my phone so I could read them throughout the day. I read them aloud, committed to speaking only the Word. There were times when I remembered hearing all the fear my mum had spoken when my dad was sick. She was gripped with fear the entire time as it was all she knew. But I had grown up in Christ since then, and knew to speak only faith. I had learned that we either feed fear or we feed faith, and that I had the power to choose which one I would feed. So, I fed my faith.

I worked at keeping out all negativity, which included resisting the temptation to go online and research all that I could about the kind of cancer I was facing. I knew that wouldn't build my faith but only tempt me with more to worry over and be fearful about. I already knew the negative side of cancer. I had lived through it all with my dad, so I didn't need to read about any of the possibilities.

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And, I believed God for a miracle. I wanted to be delivered *from* this situation. I believed that God could supernaturally heal me and simply make the cancer disappear from my body. He had done it for others, and I desperately wanted him to do it for me. But I soon discovered that God was not going to supernaturally deliver me *from* this. He was going to walk me *through* it.

TIME TO GO THROUGH

Whether we ever understand *why*, the only way to overcome any unexpected shock is *through*. No matter how much we wish we could go around a situation, under it, over it, or be delivered from it, there are times God wants to walk us through a process, because that is what's best for us.

The challenge then becomes choosing not to allow the enemy to use these unplanned and upsetting events to rob us of life. The enemy wants to derail our lives from the plans and purposes of God—if not for a lifetime, then at least for a season. He wants to pull our focus away from God's promises and divert it to our crisis. He wants to paralyze us in the present and to veil our vision and hope for our future.

But I have found that moving *through* whatever you're facing isn't about merely surviving until it's over, and then numbing your way through the rest of your life. Moving *through* is about continuing to live a life of purpose and passion—of always moving forward, never losing sight of your objective—no matter how devastating the unexpected is. Facing cancer renewed my resolve: *While I know that I will live forever in eternity, I choose to live fully alive here on earth and make every second count for God and his kingdom purposes until the day I die.*

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I was still a mother to my children, so I was not going to let the news of cancer bench me from parenting my girls. I was still a wife to Nick, and I would not allow this news to take me away mentally and emotionally. I wanted to be present in every moment. I still wanted to keep leading our ministry and make every one of my days on the planet count for the glory of God.

Cancer was a condition I had, not who I was. I didn't want one unexpected condition to define my overall condition, so I was not going to let it set the tone of my home, derail my faith, or stop me from living in every moment God had for me. I couldn't. But that decision was an hourly—and sometimes moment-to-moment—fight in my mind and will to stay on point. Regardless of what I was going *through*, I was still a child of God, a mother, a wife, a teacher, a friend, and a daughter—and I had to fight to stay focused.

My diagnosis came during one of the busiest and biggest seasons of my ministry year, and I had no margin to do all this, but battles never come at a convenient time.

I WILL NEVER BE THE SAME

The rest of July became a series of tests, ultrasounds, and more tests and more ultrasounds. I sat in many waiting rooms full of cancer patients. So many of those patients sat all alone, and I could see the fear in their eyes. People who had lost all their hair. People who could no longer walk unaided. People marked with radiation lines. People bruised from endless needles and bumps. My heart almost stopped as I watched a father wheel his son into the treatment room. I have two daughters who have never been sick. Not like this. Dear God. Mercy. Grace.

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My heart broke for them. Compassion overwhelmed me, and I knew why I was there. An unexpected illness had led me to an unexpected place, and I needed to see this. I needed to feel this. “Though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death . . . Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4 NKJV, emphasis added). Though I had learned that my condition was comparatively mild, and the type of cancer I had was highly curable through surgery, I had to walk through my own valley. Yet for many people I met, their path seemed so much harder and darker. In my case, cancer was isolated. Contained. Curable. For many of these people, cancer was running rampant throughout their bodies.

God, why?

There are so many questions I will never have the answers to this side of eternity, *but I could do what I could do and leave God to do what only he could do*. I needed to seize this opportunity to bring light, life, hope, and joy into the midst of darkness and despondency, so I had powerful conversations with patients and doctors alike, and actually began to look forward to my appointments. God was doing something in me, and Jesus was in those waiting rooms with those people because his Spirit lives in me. I was there, so he was there. Would I be bold enough to reach out, touch, love, and pray for these people? Could I believe God for those who no longer could believe for themselves?

Yes. Some of my most precious ministry moments happened in those waiting rooms and hospitals—where I met people unexpectedly and had unexpected opportunities to share the gospel and speak hope. Because of that, I will never be the same.

Many of us want a platform ministry when there are already abundant ministry opportunities available to us in waiting

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rooms all over the world. How many are waiting for us to go to them while we are waiting for them to come to us?

People are waiting for us everywhere. In the cubicle next to ours at work. In the checkout line at the supermarket. In the seat next to us in class. In the chair next to ours at the salon. On the subway ride home. On the sidelines of the soccer game. At the close of a deal. They are waiting.

When they ran a second test on my larynx to check the nodules, the ENT gave me the report personally. “I don’t know what happened, but the nodules are gone.” There was no need for surgery.

He had told me to speak very little. He had told me not to sing. But I did, and I received a miracle—and that miracle became an encouraging anchor for my soul. Why I received a miracle only for my nodules and not my thyroid or throat, I don’t know, but I kept trusting God.

Two weeks after receiving that phone call from Leslie, telling me that I had cancer, I had the growth in my throat removed during a one-hour surgery. It was a delicate procedure. The surgeon had to go in between my larynx and my trachea—so close to the proximity of my voice box, so close to affecting the instrument God had given me to speak faith and healing and hope to the world. What if I woke up and couldn’t speak anymore? I prayed fervently for the surgeon and put my faith in God.

When the pathology report came back all clear, it was a great relief to all of us, as that was the greatest concern of all my conditions. If it had been cancerous, it would have had a worse potential than the cancer on my thyroid.

And while I was so thankful, I was uncomfortably aware that someone else, perhaps one of those I sat with in one of those

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waiting rooms, would be getting a very different report that very same day. I prayed that God would give that person grace.

In September, I had a thyroidectomy, which removed half of my thyroid, and there is no trace of cancer in my body to this day. I still go for checkups. At first, they were once every two months, then four months, then six months, now once a year. I get a yearly reminder of my mortality and that life is a gift.

I am so grateful.

That my life was interrupted.

By the unexpected.

UNEXPECTED IS NEVER WASTED

I don't ever again want to go through what I did. I don't ever again want to hear those words, "Chris, you have cancer." While sitting in those waiting rooms with my dad was hard, sitting there when I was the patient was worse. Especially, when I looked at the mothers caring for their sick children.

But I'm thankful that because of the unexpected, who I am today is different from the Christine I was a few years ago. I'm much more compassionate, much more empathetic to people's pain, much more understanding when people go through a challenge. I do wish it hadn't happened, but I wouldn't want to go back to who I was before it happened.

I believe it's time for us to get good at navigating the unexpected, to embrace and understand that through unexpected occurrences in life—both good and bad—we need to trust God, anticipating him to move in it while he moves us through it. We need to realize that he never expected us to live boring and predictable lives, even though we work hard to create

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regular routines. He's called us to live lives full of joys and sorrows, battles and celebrations, successes and failures, ups and downs. And he wants us to learn how to live expecting to gain from the unexpected, especially as the world grows ever more chaotic and unpredictable.

I travel all over the globe, and I see firsthand how our world is changing. Whether I'm in airports with tighter and tighter security, or walking the streets of Thailand where child trafficking is off the charts, I see how we need to trust God with the future. Terrorism—something we never talked about decades ago—seems to be running rampant and getting closer to home. There is economic, political, social, moral, and environmental instability on every continent. Uncertainty surrounds us regardless of where we live. And no matter what kind of bubble we try to construct to manage our safety and security—physically, financially, or spiritually—trials and tribulations are going to come just as Jesus warned us.⁴ And, in our humanness, we will try to control everything—including God. Yet, we serve a God who refuses to be controlled by us. That's because part of the mystery and the adventure of following Jesus is to trust him no matter what is going on around us. To keep our hearts completely open to him, so that when the unexpected happens, he can use it for our good. To free him to use the unexpected, a necessary catalyst, to grow us, sanctify us, and help us see life with a whole new perspective, because nothing grows without disruption and interruption—without the unexpected.

If we could get this truth deeply woven into the fabric of our being, we would be far less fearful in a world that is complex and ever-changing. We could relax in knowing that while we cannot expect to control the unexpected, God is in

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control of everything, and therefore we can expect that he will be faithful to the promises he has given us in his Word.

- We can expect that his grace will be sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- We can expect that he will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).
- We can expect that he is working all things together for our good and his glory (Romans 12:28).
- We can expect that no weapon forged against us will prevail (Isaiah 54:17).
- We can expect to be more than conquerors through Christ Jesus who strengthens us (Romans 8:37).
- We can expect that greater is he that is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).
- We can expect our God to be for us (Romans 8:31).
- We can expect God to be our very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1).
- We can expect God to care for us (1 Peter 5:7).
- We can expect Jesus Christ to be consistent (Hebrews 13:8).
- We can expect streams in our desert (Isaiah 43:19).
- We can expect impenetrable walls to come down (Joshua 6:20).
- We can expect God to make a way where there is no way (Isaiah 43:16).
- We can expect our mourning to turn to gladness (Psalm 30:11).
- We can expect our sorrow to be turned to joy (Psalm 30:11).
- We can expect our broken heart to be bound up (Psalm 147:3).

When the Unexpected Interrupts

- We can expect deliverance from our enemies (Psalm 60:12).
- We can expect our giants to be defeated (1 Samuel 14:47).
- We can expect that no temptation will be more than we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- We can expect that he who promised will be faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

God wants us to learn how to accept every unexpected event as an invitation to trust Jesus and his Word, to expect his goodness all the way through. A life lived like that is one of the most powerful forces on the planet—because there’s a momentum of courage and faith that propels us into new places.

What if we learned to embrace the unpredicted shocks, stressors, and uncertainties in life and then use them for our gain? Maybe there’s a perspective, an ingredient, in the way we process life that needs to change. Maybe there’s a level of trust even higher than to believe that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28 ESV). Maybe there’s more.

I still want to cling to Romans 8:28, and watch God unfold all the good that he’s planned for my life. But I also want to cling to the *even-more* perspective that he has for us. That is the process I want us to walk through together in this book. I want you to raise your sights to a new level of faith and trust in the God who strengthens you to remain unflinching, unshakeable, immovable in the face of any unexpected events. I want your faith and trust in God to be so focused that you live each day anticipating the good he wants to do for you. I want peace to rule and reign in all the places of your heart, instead of worry, anxiety, and stress.⁵ I want your mind and your body to relax

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in confident trust, for God's endless joy to fill you over and over again, so that nothing really knocks you off your feet ever. I want you to live in expectation of your future every day.

I believe you can get there.

And I can show you how.

But first, we have to uproot any fear that has established itself in our hearts. The kind that has taken up residence in our emotions and conditioned our responses—anxiety, panic, stress, dread, nervousness, withdrawal. We're all tempted with these feelings. We all go through unexpected events that make these kinds of reactions completely understandable. But the truth is that God doesn't intend for us to live mastered by them. He intends for us to master them instead.

Nick and I have dear friends, Adrian and Jayne, who went through an experience with their infant son that no parent ever wants to face. Their story, which I share in the next chapter, is a journey of choosing faith over fear on a daily basis, and it is full of understanding that can show us how to live free from the grip of fear, help us walk in greater faith, and embrace every unexpected adventure in our future.