

ANCHOR

STANDING SECURE
IN WHO GOD IS

BETHANY BARR
PHILLIPS

A 6-WEEK DEVOTIONAL

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ANCHOR: 6 WEEK DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

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The journal features six weeks of interactive daily Bible study based on different characters of the Bible.

If you have any questions about this resource,
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ANCHOR

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STANDING SECURE IN
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INTRODUCTION

Hope

“So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary.” - Hebrews 6:18-19 (NLT)

As I began to pray and talk to the Lord about what to write for this book, all that kept coming to my mind were questions like: “What’s not already been said? What hasn’t even been thought of?”

Then I began to see an influx of calls, texts, or meetings for several weeks in a row where I was constantly reminding those on the other end or across from me that God was still for them. That He still exists. That He still loves them. That He sees them even though they don’t feel it and that He’s working for their good through the junk happening around and to them. God showed me all of this to get my attention, and these pages are the result.

Listen, I’d love to write a great book that gives someone a new and deep theological view of God, but quite honestly, comprehending something like this is next to impossible when we feel like we are a million miles away from Him, whether that be by our own choice or the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

In Anchor, we’re going to answer questions like: “How can God really be good when He feels a million miles away? Is He far away from me? Or am I far away from Him? How can He be so near when life is literally chaos? How can I do the right things and still be at the bottom of the barrel?” These aren’t questions of self-pity; they are questions beckoning an answer to our reality.

Some of us have grown up in churches that teach or practice a results-based mentality that breeds the thought that being blessed is based on how we feel rather than the goodness that is God. This is, of course, not true. We have to decide that the HOPE that lies in Jesus is far greater than the circumstances around us, good or bad, because the reality is that moments will come when we will question with all of our beings this thing we call hope.

There has to be a decision made inside of you before this moment of doubt that says, “No matter what, I’m going to trust Him. No matter what, even when I don’t understand any of it, I’m going to trust that He is working for my good” (Rom. 8:28).

It’s easier said than done. But it’s doable. You can do it. And whether you are in the midst of life’s storm or everything is all roses, know that it’s best to make up your mind what you believe before it all begins. Storms in life will reveal to you what you believe not just about yourself, but ultimately what you believe about God.

So I ask: Where’s your hope? That’s the whole idea of Anchor.

Today I had a conversation with a 14-year-old. She asked me about a tattoo on my arm, which was really just her way of opening a conversation about how she wants to get a semicolon tattooed on her arm one day. When I smiled and asked her why, she began to share her story about how she’d struggled with suicide and suicidal thoughts. She told me that she began these thoughts after her stepdad was found dead from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Counseling began for this sweet young friend shortly after, and while she’s on the road to being in an even better state than she was originally, she was still very quick to say she needed friends around her, and she pointed to the two girls beside her. She cooks for her four younger brothers and sisters every night as her mom works, but she knows her story isn’t over yet, hence the desire for a semicolon tattoo. My new friend never complained about all of her newfound responsibilities due to the life-altering events that had occurred; no, she was choosing to look ahead, knowing something greater was coming for her as she shared her story with me. All of this from a 14-year-old.

The same is true for you.

We can easily skim through a story in the Bible forgetting that it is an actual account of someone’s life. These were real people with real struggles in real time, not just characters that we sang songs about as kids. People with families, daily activities, morning routines, and inside jokes.

Each week we are going to take a look at the real people from the Bible, a bit of a mini character study, if you will, and see their moments where it all falls apart. You’ll have the option to dig deeper into their lives by reading through their stories – not just getting a few thoughts about them. You’ll see how they are real people, and you’ll get a chance to walk in their shoes a few days. Then we are going to see how they chose to handle it. How they

moved forward, or how they didn’t. We will walk through what about their life relates to you and how you can apply it to your life now.

You know, it’s been said of the storms in our lives that you’re either going through a storm, coming out of one, or about to enter one. While that doesn’t seem like good news, if you know Jesus, you know that no matter what comes your way, you can handle it because you have the hope that is the anchor for your soul (Heb. 6:19). An anchor that brings peace and stability.

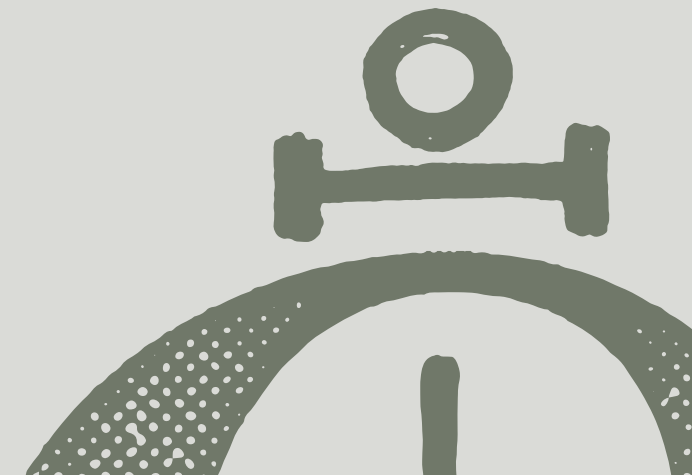
I want to challenge you with one simple question to be answered by the end of this study: What do you believe about who God is in your own life? Why do I ask? Because ultimately, what you believe will be expressed in how you live, who you love, and who or what you’re looking to for this hope.

Let’s dive into God’s Word together and really decide what we believe about who He is once and for all. Let’s take a look at the Word, God’s heartbeat, for the next six weeks and choose to see the good inside of each of these people’s incredibly hard situations.

One quick word about how each week of this devotion works: You’ll notice there are only five days per week. This is done intentionally. First, I want to make sure that you have a couple extra days to finish that week’s reading. I know life gets busy. And for some of you, you’re still working on developing the habit of meeting God in the Bible on a regular basis. Second, I hope the five weekly days of content allows you time to really process what you’re learning. Finally, consider spending the extra two days a week just focusing on Scripture instead of a devotional book. Use the themes this book introduces to dig deeper in the Bible.

Let’s choose to make God and His Word our Anchor.

BBP



WEEK 1

As you begin your journey through Anchor here at week one, be intentional to lean in and learn more when you come across words that you have heard before. Let words like 'faith' & 'promise' become new in your own heart. Allow God to show you fresh truths as you dive into the idea of Him as your anchor. I'm praying this week begins a journey that you remember for how God showed Himself hope-filled, even as the world seems hopeless.

WEEK 1 DAY 1

WHAT IS IT?

- ANCHOR - an·chor - `aNGk r -

NOUN:

A: a heavy object attached to a rope or chain and used to moor a vessel to the sea bottom, typically one having a metal shank with a ring at one end for the rope and a pair of curved and/or barbed flukes at the other.
B: a person or thing that provides stability or confidence in an otherwise uncertain situation.

VERB:

A: secure firmly in position.
B: provide with a firm basis or foundation.

It's day one of Anchor, and I'm already enthralled with the word—the idea, the sound, the feeling, the security of it. What about you? Take a step back for a minute, breathe in a deep breath, and envision these next six weeks and all God has for you through your time in this book.

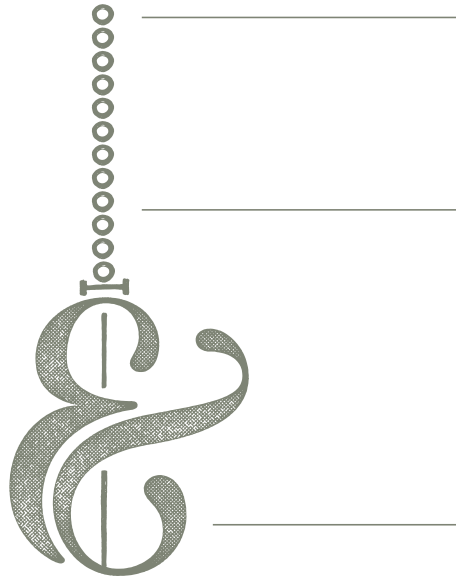
I can say confidently that God has something in store for you because I know this isn't about me: it's about the true Author of the words we will be swimming in knowing we have a true anchor: God.

The key verse for this entire book in case you missed the intro (which you should read because it sets up the entire book):

*"So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the **hope** that lies before us. This **hope** is a strong **and** trustworthy **anchor** for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary." - Hebrews 6:18-19 (NLT)*

What I find so incredibly comforting is that the word HOPE precedes the word *ANCHOR*. It's almost as if one is TIED to the other... see what I did there? ;-). The anchor is strong and trustworthy. So, we can deduce that the anchor is what we can put our faith in because of the strength we find in its faithfulness and its steadfastness.

So, let's do something cool. I want you to fill in the diagram I've started for you below.



Look at that anchor. I want you to label it "God." We know an anchor has to hold something, by definition. See that rope? At the other end of the rope, I want you to write the word "you" as if that rope is tied tightly to you. The rope connecting both you and God is the integral part of this drawing. I want you to label the rope "Jesus." Now, turn your book upside down. The anchor is never holding you down as not to move forward, but instead, it connects you to the source of hope: God (by way of Jesus). We will come back to this drawing, so keep it handy.

As a visual person by nature, I see this diagram and see yet another depiction of the Gospel (Life hack: a great way to tell your friends about Jesus!) Why is that so important? Because as believers, we can never tire of hearing the truth

that God loves us and made His Son the lifeline to a relationship with Him. Anchors aren't needed if there's nothing to move the vessel. But we know that in life, we are always moving, and things are always shifting. People lie. Fathers leave. The news is nuts. No one can agree on basically anything. But let's not put all of our focus on that. Let's put our focus on the need for an anchor, the Anchor.

This is why we not only need an anchor, but we cling to, hold fast, and trust with all our might the Anchor we have (God) by way of Jesus - our rope, what ties us to the Anchor, our lifeline.

So, day one, I'm not going to pull any punches or try to soften you up to the idea of Jesus. You have just drawn it firsthand. So where are you in this scenario?

Have you come to a saving faith relationship with Jesus? Is there a "rope" in your life connecting you to God? If so, consider taking a moment in prayer, thanking God that through His Son, Jesus, He provided a pathway for you to be in a relationship with Him.

Maybe you've come to a saving faith in God, but if you're honest with yourself, you live as if that rope weren't connecting you and your Anchor. If this describes you, what kind of heart work do you need to do to get right with God? What is keeping you from being more connected to your Anchor?

You may find yourself having read this first day and realizing there is no rope connecting you and God, the Anchor. You know that you have never had a moment where you told Jesus you believe that He is the Son of God who came to earth to live and die so that your sin debt would be paid and you could have an eternal, peaceful relationship with God. If this describes you, let me assure you that God wants to be in a relationship with you. If you find yourself desiring to go further in discovering what it means to be in a relationship with God, I want to encourage you to reach out to someone you trust whom you KNOW has come to saving faith in Jesus. I want to challenge you to find them and talk with them about what it's like to be so perfectly tied to the one, true Anchor.

God is calling you to Himself. How are you responding? It's a powerful question to consider as we kick off this book.

WEEK 1 DAY 2

A PROMISE, AN OATH, AND A TACO

“So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary.”

- Hebrews 6:18-19 (NLT)

Promise. If we are honest with each other, that’s a word that doesn’t hold much weight these days. By the time we understand how to order our tacos to our own specifications in a drive-thru, we have seen and heard so many promises that we inevitably doubt that the person taking our order will get it correct. When they do, we celebrate them. When they don’t, we “expected it” and roll our eyes as we spend the next five minutes getting the loathsome “taco sauce” (what is that stuff, anyways?) off of our three chicken soft tacos.

That’s why I love these verses from Hebrews. Not their relation to tacos, but that God goes a step beyond what’s expected. Here’s the great thing about God: *He’s never going to do “just enough.” He’s always going to do more.* (Don’t believe me? Check out Ephesians 3:20)

God doesn’t just give us the promise that He is our hope; He gives us an oath. An oath is a vow. When God makes a promise or an oath, He doesn’t break it. That’s enough to build our hope right there!

But let’s keep going. Directly after the “promise and oath” we see something that we can take so much comfort in: it is impossible for God to lie.

Let’s camp out here for just a minute. I have recently heard and/or been in conversations where a person decides that just because something didn’t work out the way he or she prayed, that must mean God didn’t hear them or that God lied about being there for them. And when they really know their Bible, they try to insert Romans 8:28 somewhere in their discussion.

Do you see the first error in those statements? The way they prayed. Isn't it an interesting thing about humanity that we think we instinctively know better than God what's good for us? "If this outcome makes me happy then it automatically must be God's will for my life." Just because something is good doesn't mean that something is God's will. Our happiness isn't the promise or oath that we were given at all.

THE PROMISE AND THE OATH ARE HOPE. Not always comfort. Not always happiness. Not always sauce-free tacos. Hope. The promise AND the oath are both hope. God's faithfulness should most certainly be an anchor for us all. An anchor for us in the chaos. An anchor for us in peace. HOPE is what keeps us moving forward. It's what drives us. It's what allows us to keep on when nothing makes any sense.

It's as if God is saying in part of this passage, "I don't just promise you this truth, I am making an oath and saying you can take hold of hope because it is (I am) your anchor."

The action step for us to take is whether or not we're going to step out and trust that God really is who He said He would be in our own lives. Are we going to allow Him to be what drives us forward, what anchors us, when life keeps on being ... life?

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." That's a promise you can sink everything you have into because it's a direct reminder that what we read in Scripture, written centuries ago, still applies to us today. God was the Anchor then, and He is the Anchor now.

Have you ever thought through the difference between a promise and an oath? Take a minute today and write down all of the promises you can think of that God has given us. If you are stuck at the starting point, start with air. Consider writing your answer below.

Now thank God for all of the promises you named, as well as those you can't think of yet. Thank God that He is the same ALWAYS. If you want to write out your prayer, do so in the space provided for you below.

As you go about your day today, carry a thankful heart full of the promises you are reminded of.

WEEK 1 DAY 3

FAITH AND HOPE

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”
- Romans 10:17

As a kid growing up in a small town in the Deep South, I spent part of my summer going to a day camp called Vacation Bible School (VBS). Looking back, it’s amazing to me that it’s really the only thing that bonded churches (a.k.a., groups of followers of Jesus) together in my community. Why? Because no one ever cared if you were Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and so on. It was a relatively safe environment that was free for half a day, complete with the cookies you put on your fingers like rings, the sweetest grape drink, and all the kickball you could play. Heaven for an eight-year-old, right? (Or a 35-year-old, but I digress.)

On the surface, there was unity happening, but beneath the finger paint, the puppets, and the construction paper cutouts was a place where children and the adults teaching them were basing every one of those activities around the Word of God. That unity was building up a faith that was producing hope.

Read Romans 10:17. Faith and hope often get intertwined, but they are two different functions of our walk with God that work so closely together that one actually produces the other.

Martin Luther, in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, writes: “Hope and faith differ in regard to their sources. Faith originates in the understanding, while hope rises in the will... Without hope faith cannot endure. On the other hand, hope without faith is blind rashness and arrogance because it lacks knowledge. Before anything else a Christian must have the insight of faith, so that the intellect may know its directions in the day of trouble and the heart may hope for better things. By faith we begin, by hope we continue.”

Bethany’s translation: Deep down, our faith cannot be shaken because it

is what we know to be true about God – it’s what His Word tells us. But it is our hope that allows us to continue on, encouraged and active in our walk with God.

Where both faith and hope are, we will find a thriving believer.

Notice I didn’t say an “always happy” believer or a “believer that always gets the reward they deserve” or a believer that has “nothing bad” happen to them...you see where I’m going? Just because we have faith in God and a hope that He leads us doesn’t mean that the tough side of life doesn’t still happen. Not to keep reminding us of the darkness, but people fail. Loved ones leave. Cancer happens. Jobs are lost. Does that mean that we didn’t have enough faith? NO!!!

It means that there is sin in the world. Because of that we need a Savior, and that comes through faith in Jesus, which brings hope eternal. That hope is what puts smiles on our faces when we wake up the next day knowing verses like Lamentations 3:22-23.

Earlier we asked: Where is your faith and how is your hope? Why is that important to know? The answer reveals the condition of your heart. Why is that important to know? Because it will begin to unveil feelings of bitterness or resentment you’ve been harboring. Those feelings show themselves in your attitude and your lifestyle. It could also show you the deep love you have for someone or something and then you realize that you’ve allowed what is “good” to take the place of God who created them or it.

Read Lamentations 3:22-25. Write it below.

In whom or what do you place your faith?

Describe your level of overall hope.

Take a minute today to connect with God through His Word and through prayer. Ask the Lord to restore your faith, which has maybe been dormant or stagnant. Renew your hope in these promises you’ve just read. Then take some time to journal your conversation with Him.

WEEK 1 DAY 4

FLIP IT

"I have learned to kiss the waves that throw me up against the Rock of Ages."
- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Today I want you to take out that drawing you made on day one. Now do me a favor and flip it back right side up. (This isn't a trick question.) We are putting the anchor on the bottom again where our brains think it should go. (If you didn't do the drawing, go ahead and head back over to page one and channel your inner Bob Ross . . . I can wait.)

There are moments in life when, whether we mean to or not, we choose to see things in a certain way. It's in these moments that we can miss all of the goodness that can be offered. Case in point: Oreos.

The first time I saw Nabisco start tweaking the Oreo, I thought, "You've GOT to be kidding me. How could they get better?" One evening I broke down and bought a package of Peeps-filled Oreos with my friend Januar because the packaging was irresistible and they were purple, and that's my favorite color. (We are girls, and these are the things we do.)

When we got them home, we just stared at them. I only had a change of heart because of the color. What had they done to my precious cookies? But at the first bite, I realized all of my inhibitions were ridiculous: THEY WERE AMAZING! I now look forward to colorful, Peeps-filled Oreos every single spring.

The point is this: in my mind, I had only ever known Oreos one way. But now, I know that they can be equally enjoyable in their new forms. (But I draw the line at the idea of thin Oreos - that's the worst idea ever).

We can do the same thing with God at times. When life gets difficult, we can begin to only see Him as this big, far-off God that doesn't hear anything we say to Him. But, if we would take a deep breath, open His Word, and dig in to what He has for us, we will begin to find that there is an infinite amount

of facets to God that gives us a faith in who He has promised to be in our lives, even when our circumstances seem to take over.

So now, we can see through our drawing and through our Oreo story that God isn't just the Anchor above us that we are working toward. He is the Anchor beneath us that keeps us steady.

If we are honest with ourselves, this is a bit of a scary concept. To think that God could be all of these things and never let us down in it all is a little overwhelming. But we will talk more about that tomorrow. Until then, know that He is the Anchor - the Anchor that holds, the Anchor that pulls, the Anchor that draws. He will never go against anything He ever says He is. The steadiness we find in Him is pivotal to everything in life because it gives us a sense of hope—even when we don't feel it.

That's one of the best things about God.

Take a minute today and reflect on your own life. Where are you when it comes to believing God is who He says He is? Confess your doubts to Him today. He already knows. Consider writing your answer below if you want.

Read Mark 9:23-24. Here it is from The Message: "Jesus said, 'If? There are no 'ifs' among believers. Anything can happen.' No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the father cried, 'Then I believe. Help me with my doubts!'" Do you ever feel like the father felt in this passage?

Take some time and look up verses that are promises from God. (Ex.: Isaiah 40:29.) You can Google "God's promises" and find lots of helpful lists.

Consider writing a couple down in the space provided below and then ask the Lord to help you trust that He is who He says and that He will always be your Anchor.

Spend some time in prayer being open with God about your doubts and your fears. Listen to what He has to say to you. Allow His presence to comfort you and give you hope.

WEEK 1 DAY 5

THE "&" MOMENTS

For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. - Psalm 100:5

We talked yesterday about the steadiness of God. Today we are going to wrap up this week by thinking through the lens of giving God all of our hearts, not just because of what He has done, but because of what He could do in our lives.

This is not just an important thing to remember; it's crucial. As we journey through our lives, we can have the tendency to give God human parameters when things don't turn out the way we think they should, or when something doesn't happen on a timetable we necessarily agree with. This period of waiting on God to move in our lives we are going to call the "&" (and) moments.

In 2006, I had an "&" moment enter my own life. My husband and I got some news that we weren't expecting: cancer. My womb was developing cancerous cells, not a baby. My initial thoughts were sadness, but there wasn't much time to be sad because we had to go on the defense to save my body by way of chemo to wipe out the cancer.

In the back of my mind I just knew that I was going to have one of those miraculous doctor's appointments where they go in to look again and there would be no more cancer. Or they would check my blood and find it perfectly normal. God would totally set me up for that, right? I was, by definition, a vocational minister. My calling became my career, so He owed me that . . . didn't He? These were the things that swirled around in my mind while I would watch them start the infusions.

But that never happened for me. Slowly but surely, bitterness set in. It wasn't something that swept in like a wind, but little by little it began to slowly make its way from my mind into my heart. So much so that I announced one evening to my friend Leigh that I had just stopped praying. I

felt like there wasn't a point to even try because things weren't happening on my timetable.

Have you ever been there? You pray so hard, but nothing happens. Well, that was me. This was an "&" moment. I was officially waiting on God to save my life. However, as I prayed for my situation, I had this feeling that my prayers were going nowhere. I'm so thankful that God doesn't operate on feelings.

The Lord had begun a journey inside of me to transform some things – to transform how I saw Him within my circumstance. I had the choice to either go on this journey with Him or give up and join the world in its safe, narrow-minded explanations of God.

I chose to go on the journey with God. I had a friend not giving up on me, so I couldn't give up on God.

Healing didn't come overnight. I still had more than two months of chemo ahead of me before I ever saw even a tiny glimpse of hope. Through it all, I can look back and realize that this "&" wasn't for me to get exactly what I was praying about. The point of the "&" (waiting on God to move) was that the Lord was allowing my faith to be built up so that in the end He would get the glory no matter what.

In time I came to the other side of the "&." I was healed and eventually some two years later had a baby girl. But it was a journey. One of the most difficult ones I can imagine. On the other side I am a better believer for it.

The healing is incredible, but if we put all of our hope in the healing, then it's just that and nothing more. If we put our trust in the Healer, then we have the One we can always depend on to be an anchor for our souls.

We never put our faith in having our prayers answered in our own time.

We put our faith in the One who answers the prayers and trust that His outcome, His direction, and His purpose are for our good and His glory.

Have you ever been through an "&" moment? Describe it in the space provided below.

Have you ever had prayers that weren't answered in the way you thought was best? Describe them below.

What happened? God always answers our prayers according to His will. How did God answer your prayer?

Take a moment and confess your heart to the Lord in prayer. Confess any frustration, discouragement, or disappointment that you may have resulting from unanswered prayers.

Now take some time to ask the Lord what He is wanting to show you through it all. What is He saying?