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ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8 (KJV)

To every thing there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant,
and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and
a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.

(E M P H A S I S M I N E)



DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE RATS

(THE THINGS THAT HINDER YOU)

To say that my father was a hard and angry man would be—like Newton's law of gravitation—an unassailable truth. When angered, his blue eyes would turn to ice and his voice to steel, especially when he had his fill of Jack Daniel's and goofballs¹. He ruled our household with a rod of iron—or a coat hanger, a belt, an electric cord—whatever was handy to inflict pain and punishment.

Dad was born in 1920 on a hardscrabble farm in Geneva, Alabama. His name was Robert, but everybody called him “Bob” to his face and “Wally,” the name of a cartoon character, behind his back. He learned early at the hand of my Grandfather Will that disobedience, real or perceived, brought swift retribution. Will Evans, who had learned

from his father, was also an abusive man who ultimately passed that curse along to his son, my father.

As a seven-year-old boy, Dad was forced to plow rows of peanuts and cotton behind a mule all day long in the hot Alabama sun. He could barely reach the crosspiece on the turning plow to hang on as the animal dragged him down one row and up the next. His father, tobacco juice dribbling down his chin, sat under a tree at the edge of the field. In one hand he grasped a long rope; in the other was a jug of white lightning. If Dad flagged or the mule stopped, Will slowly rose, fed out the rope, and walked just far enough to be able to reach Dad with the rope. Twirling it like a whip, he would unleash the coil to snap Dad on his sweat-soaked back. Reeling the rope in, he would again set it in motion to pop the mule on the flank and urge it forward. Boy and mule would set out again across the field in an effort to please the tyrant watching over them. This was my dad's early example of a father's care and concern. It was events such as these that shaped my father's life and his relationship with his children.

When I was six years old, my father operated a John Deere bulldozer at the local dump. From early morning to closing time, he dug holes, pushed trash into them, and then it was burned. After the flames were extinguished,

Dad would bury the remains. When he saw that the grocery stores had thrown daily foodstuff into the dumpsters, he would sort through it and bring any salvageable goods home. Our family was very poor, lived in the Projects, and much of our food was scavenged from the dump.

One morning, I accompanied him to work. I quickly spied boxes of “white” chocolate that had been thrown away. What I didn’t know was that it was dark chocolate that had turned white because of age. I climbed over piles of trash to retrieve it, and as I reached out, rats emerged from beneath the garbage. I shuddered and screamed in terror. Suddenly, an elderly black man sitting in a nearby chair smiled and handed me a stick. I looked up at him and saw that he had only two front teeth. He cautioned me, “Don’t be afraid of the rats. They are just as afraid of you as you are of them.” I took the stick from him, grasped it as I would a baseball bat, and swung as hard as my six-year-old arms could swing it. I connected with a pile of the garbage, and as I did, the rats ran!

The fear of the unknown can be a devastating hindrance. I feared the unknown when reaching for the boxes of chocolate; however, once I was armed with an offensive weapon, that fear disappeared. The biblical David had learned those lessons in the sheepcote armed with a sling and a staff. It

would be critical when he faced one of the most decisive battles of his life: against the giant of Gath! David learned the first thing to do when trouble emerges: Trust God!

After David was anointed by Samuel, there came a morning when his father, Jesse, ordered his youngest son to take supplies to his brothers who were battling the Philistines in the Valley of Elah. Upon his arrival, David beheld the imposing figure of Goliath and heard the challenge being hurled across the valley to his quaking audience on the other side. David was incensed that no one in King Saul's army had the courage to face the giant. They all stood on the sidelines, intimidated by the ferocity of the huge warrior. David was not foolhardy; he knew beyond a doubt that only through the power of God could anyone defeat this adversary. He asked those around him what would be the reward for the one who slayed the enemy. David's brothers were angered by his question and began to ridicule him. He then marched before Saul and offered to fight the giant.

When Saul questioned both his youth and ability, David replied:

“I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go

after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!"

(Samuel 17:34–37 NLT)

David was a man of great humility; he knew that he was unable to do anything except through the power of God. He declined to accept any commendation for his feats; he gave God the credit. He boldly assured Saul that God would stand with the man who dared go forth in His name; that God would give that man victory. In humility, David offered himself as an instrument in his Father's hands.

King Saul offered David his personal armor for the battle with Goliath. After having tried it on, the young man realized that the covering fashioned by mortal hands was insufficient for the task. Like the apostle Paul, David understood that he was only safe when covered with the full armor of God. He would be vulnerable in Saul's armor; he would be

invincible wrapped in the presence of Jehovah-Sabaoth—the Lord our Protector.

The lack of vision can be equally hindering. My friend the late pastor and evangelist Myles Munroe defined vision as “the idea that never leaves you, the dream that won’t go away and the passion that won’t subside.”² No matter how often discouragement knocks on your door, no matter how demanding the circumstances, your God-given vision will propel you forward toward your goal. With faith and tenacity, you will reap the reward.

The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13–14 (NKJV):

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

My wife, Carolyn, taught me a faith lesson when our last child was born. I had secretly wanted a son to love, probably because I never had a father who loved me. I thought I would only have my three beautiful daughters, which was fine with me. They are my sweethearts! But God gave Carolyn and me another child. Carolyn obstinately refused to listen

to the opinions of others—those who told her she would have another girl. She believed God had told her a boy was on the way. Let me repeat that: She believed God! She was totally convinced, against all odds, that our baby would be a boy and declared that he would be named Michael David Evans II. I reminded Carolyn that I didn't have a middle name. Of course, it didn't faze her at all; the new mother won that battle. Soon thereafter, I appeared before a judge to have my name changed to Michael David Evans. Both my son and I are now named "David" as are hundreds and thousands of boys and their fathers worldwide. I later told my son, "I was named after you. When I grow up, I want to be just like you."

This book is special to me; I wanted it to be our book—mine and yours. I want us to delve deeply into the Scriptures and ask God to reveal the principles that will light a fire in our bones. Over the years, I have traveled millions of miles—from the Kremlin Palace in Moscow to the Royal Palace in Madrid. I have met popes, princes, prime ministers, and presidents on my journey.

Everything God has promised me has come to pass. God answers prayer; He doesn't require that you see Him, only that He sees you. Wherever you are, in whatever trouble you may find yourself, you are free to call upon

Him in prayer. The story of the shepherd/king is one of a man's face bronzed by the blazing heat of adversity. He faced a giant and a demon-driven king. He was elevated by Jehovah to become the most famous king in Israel. David had a heart filled with delight in a holy God. His fingerprints and the record of his extravagant love affair with the God of Israel are imprinted in the pages of the Old Testament. David's life was not without sin; he committed adultery and even murder. Yet it was failure that drew him to God. It was his passion to touch God in prayer, and his hungry heart that activated a heavenly response. David prayed with a voracious desperation, knowing prayer was his only avenue to Jehovah. God took David's broken heart and from its depths inspired him to write: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:1-2 KJV).

David had learned that lesson as a shepherd. God had miraculously provided protection for him and for his flock. When David faced the giant, he was prepared. Crossing the brook, David selected five smooth stones and dropped them into his shepherd's bag.

As he approached the Valley of Elah, Goliath began to fling insults:

He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!” (1 Samuel 17:43–44 NIV)

David’s battle cry was simply: “I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Samuel 17:45b NIV).

God had proven to be strong in battle, present during trials, Light in the darkness, Living Water in the desert, David’s Provider. That was the basis for David’s humility, knowing that he himself could do nothing but that he could do anything through God if his faith was rooted and grounded in Him.

In the end, Goliath lay on the ground—one of David’s five stones that he had secreted in his pouch embedded deeply in the giant’s forehead. David then used the giant’s own weapon to lop off his head and give Israel the victory—not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts (see Zechariah 4:6, paraphrased). David had long known that with God on his side, he was in the majority.

I have had baggage in my life, especially as an abused child. The Holy Spirit has taught me that God can turn a broken heart into art, grief into glory, and pain into power, purpose, and passion. God touched David in a way that changed his world forever. He did the same for me, as you will see in the pages of this book. Once He did, my world was never the same, and neither will yours be.

Psalm 37:23–24 reads: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand” (KJV).

As with King David, I live each day expecting a miracle. God is ready to anoint what you have. David was able to defeat the enemy of his soul because he allowed God to define who and what he was. I, too, remain ready for another outpouring of that anointing in my life. Like David, I pray with a desperate and hungry heart. David knew, as I know, that prayer is the only way.

The New Testament begins with Jesus Christ, the descendant of the king of Judah; it ends with: “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16 NKJV).

God gave David—and me—a future and a hope; He will give you the same. God gave David the means to a bright

future and a throne. Do not let past experiences hold you back. David could have declared he was but a shepherd boy unfit to rule an entire nation. I could have used my lack of relationship with an abusive father to keep me from reaching my God-ordained goals. The prophet Jeremiah wrote in chapter 29, verses 11–13 (NKJV):

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

David had both drive and determination. He was resolved that nothing would hinder him from the call God had placed on his life. He would battle giants, elude the armies of kings, or whatever it took to reach the promised throne. I, too, made a commitment to God to answer His call. For the life of my ministry, He has opened doors that seemed impossible to open. The days, weeks, months, and years that have raced by have been invested in His kingdom. As a child, I was “afraid of the rats”; I have come to realize that when you and I are armed with the Word of Truth, nothing is impossible.