JOSH: Good morning, Mission Hills. Good to see all of you here this morning. Good to see you, thank you. It’s good to be home. It’s like coming home. It’s so cool. Good to be with you. My name is Josh and for those of you who I haven’t met yet, I have the privilege of coming back here and preaching the weekend after Thanksgiving which kind of seemed to be a tradition over the last few years, except for last year because I was on staff for several years. And for the last 18 months, I’ve been now over at a different church but I miss and I love you and it’s so good to see all of you. At the risk of sounding like Apostle Paul, let me say I give thanks for you every time I remember you.

God’s doing unbelievable things here and I do miss you. I’m so excited to be back. Get this, as I’m here, Shannon Pop, the youth pastor here is over preaching in my pulpit at Grace Chapel, isn’t that cool? You didn’t know you entered into church swap this morning, right? It’s like an episode of church swap happening right in front of your eyes. It’s exciting.

I remember that sermon that I preached, it was the last sermon that I preached here where I built that cross. And I told you as I stood in front of you, I said, “I promise you, I promise you that we’re going to team together,” that Mission Hills and Grace Chapel are gonna team together and we’re gonna do our best to reach this city and it’s happening. It’s happening, this morning, it’s happening.

What an amazing invitation to come back. I gotta tell you, the invitation to return, it shows a beautiful piece of your pastor’s heart that needs to be appreciated. The fact that Craig Smith would invite me to come back and to be here is so cool. It shows that he has a kingdom mindset. We got to be very clear, our churches don’t compete, right? Churches do not compete. Churches are not like businesses where they compete. We are all in this together. We’re on the same team, we got the same coach. We’re going against the same opponent, right? And we’re trying to reach as many people as we can with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I had the privilege of meeting Craig before he started here, we met for lunch and it was a sweet exchange. We sat at Chili’s that day and I said, “Man, you’re going to love these people, you’re gonna love these people.” And I got in my car and I left lunch that day and I thought, “These people are going to love him. He’s a great pastor”. You got a good man in Craig Smith. He loves God’s word, he loves you and praise God for Him bringing him here.

I’ve got to tell you one more, kind of crazy Craig Smith story. So also before he started, I was in Santa Cruz, not Denver, Santa Cruz, California. I’m far away from Denver. I’m there with Byron Johns, you remember Byron Johns? He was the executive pastor here for about 15 years, helped us get in this building. He was an amazing leader. And he and I were consulting with this church in Santa Cruz and we knew that we were not far from Mike Romberger who was the senior pastor here for 14 years, he was just up the road and we had even planned to do dinner at his house the next night.

But the night we arrived, we go to this restaurant, we sit down at our table, we’re eating our meal and then the hostess walks in and seats someone right next to us and it’s Mike Romberger. And not only Mike Romberger, it’s Mike Romberger and Craig Smith, how crazy is that, right? We ended up in the same restaurant, from three different states, at the same time, tables next to each other. And here I am with Mike Romberger, pastor of Mission Hills for 15 years, Byron Johns, executive pastor for 15 years or 14 years. They basically served together, which is amazing. And then you have the new pastor of Mission Hills, Craig Smith who was coming on and then little old me, right? We’re all there together. I swear, I heard a voice, “You’re now standing on holy ground.” I said, “Guys, we gotta take a picture of this. This is unbelievable.”
And so we got up and we took a picture. And Colleta was there, Jane was there. It was such a cool moment, an amazing moment. And Craig, later that day, he posted this picture on Facebook, just saying this was one more confirmation that God had called him here. You gotta listen to me clearly, I am so excited about what God’s gonna do through this man and through the future of Mission Hills. And I know that God called me to Grace. Yes, I miss you but now I’m serving at Grace. And get this, if you take county line and you stretch it out, the road county line, like eight miles of county line, I’m just on the other end, right? I’m just on the other end.

And together we’re gonna take Douglas County for Jesus Christ, amen? We’re going to reach the south side of Denver. And so I’m so excited to be here today and to partner with you and I want to do my favorite thing at Mission Hills. Today I wanna do the thing that I love the most, that I’ve missed the most and that is to look at God’s word with you. So let’s dive in. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, holy God in heaven, we thank you so much for being so faithful, for knowing our future, for giving us hope. I think about the last time I knelt on this stage, I thought it was the last time I would ever kneel on this stage, the last time I would ever preach. Yet you knew the future, you had a day where you knew I’d come back and I’d get to be with my brothers and sisters who I love. And Lord, you know also what’s ahead of us. You know what we need to do with our churches, your church, the head is you. You are the leader, God, we worship you. You know what we need to do to reach the city. So God, will you please empower us, will you inspire us, will you move us on your agenda? Do what you have with us.

And now as I preach your word, God, please know I am so in need of you. I declare my dependence upon you. I pray that you’ll use my mind and my lips and my heart, you’ll use all of this to preach today. May you be the loudest preacher in the room. It’s in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

I have a good question for you, how many of you have a hobby? Most of you? Come on, you have a hobby, right? Most of you have a hobby of some kind and I’m gonna guess that most of you are not embarrassed to share your hobby. Most hobbies are not something we’re embarrassed of, but I have a hobby that I’m just going to admit is a little bit awkward. It’s nerdy, it’s embarrassing. My hobby is this, I collect socks. I know, it’s crazy but I collect crazy socks.

About six years ago, I declared to my family, my siblings included, “Hey, guys, that’s it. I’m done with plain socks. No more white, no more black, it’s gotta be crazy.” And so I brought my sock drawer to show you. Actually, true confession, this is only part of my collection. I’ve been collecting them for some time, you have to understand, when I started the collection, it was before you could find them anywhere. Like, they are hard... Now, you can walk into King Soopers and find crazy socks, right? But I was buying them before you could find them. I had to scout them out, search them out, find them.

And so now, I have my crazy sock collection and I keep good track of it. I prioritize them, I roll them a specific way, I have them for each season. I could tell you which ones are my favorites and where I got them. Let me see, there’s gotta be another favorite in here. Oh, these one, these pink swordfish ones. I love those ones. I enter them into my Excel spreadsheet and I keep track of...

Now, let me draw an analogy for you here for a moment, just as I have a sock drawer full of my favorite socks, so I also have a drawer full of my favorite verses. It may not be a literal drawer, right. But I got this list or bunch of verses that I hold to and I love and they’re my favorites. And I slip them on over my soul and I cling to them when life gets hard. I’m gonna guess you have the same thing. Out of all the bible verses that we have listed for as saying God’s word, I guarantee there are some that you would say, “That’s my favorite”. And I bet you that if I could open the drawer of your favorite verses this morning, I would find today’s passage in that drawer.

I bet this is a favorite verse for many of you. It’s the verse Jeremiah 29:11. Is that in your favorite verse drawer? How many of you...
admit that? Some of you even say, “That’s my life verse, man.” I love Jeremiah 29:11. Just to prove how popular it is, let’s just quote it from memory for a second, okay? Because I know some of you have it memorized. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you,” or have welfare. “Plans to not harm you,” no evil. “Plans to give you a,” what? “A future and a hope”.

Dare I say that even non-Christians love this verse. People who may not be familiar with any part of the bible, they know this verse. It’s been used in speeches, it’s been used in governmental addresses, it’s been written in graduation cards for as long as there’s been graduations. It’s been put on the tombstones. People love this verse.

Now, I call this verse a tweet from God, a tweet from heaven. It’s tweetable, right? A hundred and forty characters or less, man. It’s power-packed, it’s direct. And we post it and we like it and we favorite it and we re-post it. The truth is, the bible is full of tweetable verses, things that we love so much, that speak right to our hearts. So with that said, I want to unpack Jeremiah 29:11 here today. I’ve entitled my message, #waitforit.

The bible’s most famous passage about your future. The bible’s most famous tweet about your future. Now, like tweets, we often will take a passage and we’ll take it out of context, we’ll look at 140 characters and we won’t pay attention to any of the context around it. Have you ever read a tweet like that? You’ve read some kind of tweet or a post and you’re like, “What? I’ve no idea what that says.” Or all of a sudden you’re like, “That’s a cool statement.” But you have no idea where it came from or what context it was actually in. We do the same thing with bible verses.

We take these famous passages, we pull them out of their context and we’re like, “Wow, that’s awesome.” And we don’t pay attention to all of that’s happening around it and therefore, we’re forfeiting even more meaning that could be had by us. There’s so much background that can be given to us. So I wanna make you two promises right off the bat here today. Number one, I wanna promise you that I’m not gonna take your favorite verse, if Jeremiah 29:11 as your favorite or one of your favorites, I’m not gonna take it, crumple it up, throw it in the corner or poke holes in it. I’m not gonna cause you to go, “Wow, why was that ever my favorite verse?” Because I’m going to guess some of you already have it tattooed on your body and I don’t want you to have to leave here and buy tattoo removal cream, okay? So if this is already cherished by you, I want you to still love it. That’s my first promise. I will not take your favorite verse and smash it. And second promise I’m gonna make you is this. I will take this all familiar verse and I will bring it to fuller meaning by helping you understand where it lies within Scripture.

I will help you understand the background, the grander landscape around it. We’re gonna go on a history tour back to Ancient Israel, don’t fall asleep on me on that one. We’re gonna go back in time, it’s gonna be a great little tour. But we’re gonna take this journey back in time to find true meaning. We’re gonna take a journey back in time to find the historical context of Jeremiah 29:11. And I’m sure that by taking this journey, we will find more meaning by grasping why this was originally said to those whom it was said to and then we will be able to better apply it to our own lives.

So go ahead, grab your bible, open up to this passage, even if you have it memorized. It might be good for you to look at it, it’s found on page 656 in the ESV or in the bibles that are in front of you. And we’re gonna look at Jeremiah 29:11. Now, I’m gonna give you a lot of background leading up to this verse. I want you to kind of get a timeline in your head. As you look up this passage, I want you to picture that we’re getting in a time machine and we’re going way, way back. Right now, we’re in 2016. We’re gonna go back even before Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus Christ came around somewhere around the end of B.C. and the beginning of A.D. We’re gonna go back into B.C.

I want you to get this timeline in your mind, around 970 B.C. to about 585 B.C. It’s a long time ago. Back then, we encounter a time in Israel’s history where it was in complete unrest. Prior to 970, there was only a few rulers or kings, Kind David being one of them. Kind David was a man after God’s own heart, he did some amazing things in his life. He did some good things, he did
some bad things. But he was a man that loved God and God loved him.

And pretty much, for all intents and purposes, I can say this, the land of Israel was obeying what God had for them. The Israels, Israel's enemies, the enemies of Israel they were at rest. It was pretty much pointed in the right direction. And you remember, King David had this affair with this woman. He basically stole a woman, he had a baby, that baby dies. He had another baby with Bathsheba named Solomon. We're gonna pick it up at Solomon.

Solomon rules and reigns. And again, during his reign, though he did some sinful things, he was blessed by God. The nation was pretty much headed in the right direction. And not only that, Solomon got to build the first temple. David wanted to build the first temple. Remember God's presence came down and it was amongst them in a tabernacle, a tent. And David said, “A tent will not do for my God. I wanna build a temple.” Well, God wouldn't allow it. So, God had Solomon build the temple.

The temple was this place where God’s presence would dwell in the land, where they would be able to commune with him. Solomon builds this beautiful temple in 966 B.C. Nation's still doing well for about 10 years after Solomon's reign. And then the kingdom is divided. This little land, about the size of New Jersey, is divided into two different kingdoms, the northern kingdom being Israel, the southern kingdom being Judah. Jerusalem, the main city that we know in Israel was part of Judah, the southern kingdom.

Now this kingdom's divided, there's all these different kings that are living, most of them not doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. And during this time, the prophets lived. Now, the prophets take up a big part of our bible. There's 12 minor prophets, which doesn't mean that they're small, it just means they spoke a little bit that we have recorded in the bible. There's 12 minor prophets and 4 major prophets. Jeremiah is one of the major prophets because we have a lot from him.

These guys lived during this timeline of a divided kingdom speaking very boldly to the kings, to the people, “You must listen to God. If you don’t listen to God, if you don’t turn to God's ways, then bad things will happen for you.” Well, sure enough, bad things happened. Israel, the northern kingdom is taken by Assyria in 722 B.C. They're captured and taken away. And then you have Judah, the southern kingdom who lasts a little bit longer but finally, King Nebuchadnezzar comes in and he captures Judah and he takes them away.

Now, again, all these minor prophets are living during these exiles, during these times where the land is being sieged and the people are being taken. One of those prophets is Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived during the Babylonian exile, which means that Babylon came in, captured Judah, took over Jerusalem, took the things of God from Jerusalem and Jeremiah was one of God's appointed men, prophet, a preacher, to proclaim to the people what they should be doing or not doing.

So all this is happening around the context of Jeremiah 29. All of this capturing, all of this exiling, all of this being taken to new lands. This is all happening around them. Now, I wanna zoom in very specifically to what's happening right around Jeremiah 29, chapter 29. There's this exile happening. Babylon taking Judah, that's modern day Iraq. So imagine years of us being in war with Iraq, 50 years, that's what it felt like to them. Coming in and taking the things of God, that's what's happening right around Jeremiah 29.

2 Chronicles 36, as well as 2 Kings 24, captures for us the exact context of what's happening around this favorited tweet that we have in Jeremiah 29. What's happening is there's this king named Jehoiakim, say “Jehoiakim.” Jehoiakim. If you’re looking for a baby name, it’s a great name to use. No, don’t use it actually because Jehoiakim, he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. The bible says that, chapter 36 of 2 Chronicles.

He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. And because he did what was evil, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar, this brutal king of Babylon, to come in and to capture the people. Did you hear what I said? God allowed it. God’s sovereignty in control, I believe that. But he allowed Babylon to grab Judah and that to be the discipline upon them because they were not listening or returning
So Nebuchadnezzar comes in and he takes from the temple of God all of these things that were God’s things. He takes them and he takes them back to his palace. Let me just ask you this question, how many of you think it’s a good idea to steal from God’s house and use it in your own kitchen? Anyone? No takers on that one? Yeah, you’re right. It’s a terrible idea. Yeah, but God shares and God cares and he’s loving. Yeah, but not with that stuff, right? God has His things in His temple and now they were taken away. Nebuchadnezzar was like, “What’s the big deal? I’ll use it for myself” because he thought he was God. God had other plans for him, we can read about that in the Book of Daniel.

So this is all happening and Jeremiah is passionately pleading with the people, “If you just pay attention, we’ve already started the exile.” Remember, it was 50 years long. “We’ve already started it. If you don’t pay attention it’s only gonna get worse for us,” and sure enough, it did. Jehoiakim ruled for 11 years and things got worse under his reign. Finally, Jehoiakim’s out. Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, real original, right? Jehoiachin comes in and he’s the new king. Now the acorn didn’t fall too far from the tree. Jehoiachin was no better than Jehoiakim.

Get this, he only reigned for 3 months and 10 days. He only made it 100 days before it was all over. He was terrible and things went from bad to worse. The Babylonian siege kept happening and Jeremiah kept saying, “Return to God, return to God.” But no one was returning. No matter how clear Jeremiah was with his instruction or his warning, these people would not change. So around Jeremiah 29, we see Jeremiah’s tone change. For seemingly 28 chapters, he’s warning them, he’s telling them to repent. And if you’re reading the bible with your eyes wide open, you’ll see that he goes from this tone of, “You gotta watch out, you gotta watch out, you gotta watch out, you gotta turn.” He changes his tone and now he starts talking about a future hope and a future glory.

It’d be kind of like this. When I’m disciplining my kids, we have four kids now, can you believe that? We popped one out since I was here last, it’s crazy. We’re drowning in kids right now, it’s so fun. But I’m trying to discipline them and teach them the way of the Lord, right? And my 6-year-old, he’s made it his hobby to hit his sisters. He loves hitting his sisters, it’s just a way to pass time. So I will say to him firm warnings. Like, “Chandler, don’t hit your sister. Chandler if you hit your sister again, you’re gonna get a discipline. Chandler, the end of your life is getting closer because you keep hitting your sister”.

But imagine if my tone changed. I’m telling him this, I’m telling and all of a sudden, I change my tone. “Oh, buddy. You have great hope in the future, Chandler. You are gonna someday love your sister. Chandler in the future, your sister is gonna be your very best friend. Chandler, in the future you’re gonna have a son just like you.” No, forget that part. But imagine my tone changed, right? I go from warning, repent, repent, to there’s hope for you, there’s hope for you.

It’s exactly what’s happening here. Jeremiah changes his tone. I hope you see by getting into the context here, this passage had a lot of meaning to its original receivers. They were captured, they were losing their hope quickly, they had bad leadership all around them. And if you put yourself in their shoes or their sandals, you get into their sandals and you feel what they felt, all of a sudden this passage has so much more meaning. They’re in a foreign land. They’re under a brutal king.

Nebuchadnezzar was terrible. He skinned his enemies alive. He would take his enemies and put them on posts and light them on fire just so he could have light in this palace yard. They’re being held captive. They’re in this land full of pagan beliefs. And they’re having to live amongst the people that capture them, maybe even killed some of their relatives. And all the while they’re just scared and they’re praying for hope and they’re longing for the nightmare to be over. And it’s like God’s just saying, “Wait, just stay”. What? “Yeah, just stay”.

If you let yourself get in their situation, you feel what they felt. And maybe it’s not hard for you to imagine their hopelessness. Maybe it’s not hard for you to go there in your mind because you know what it’s like to be hopeless, you know what it’s like to feel like you’re captive, captive in a marriage that’s gone awry, captive to some sin that you can’t seem to shake. And you’ve cried out to God and you said, “God, please help. God, please help.” And He’s just saying, “Stay. Stay because I have a plan.”
See, if you understand the context, this passage is so tender, it’s so sweet, it’s so refreshing. But when you feel what they felt you can understand their confusion. Verse 1 through 10 of Jeremiah 29, God’s just telling them, “I want you to stay. I want you to plant gardens. I want you to build houses. I want you to have kids. I want you to stop hoping for greener grass or to go back. I want you to stay.” And he’s saying, “I want you to listen to me. Don’t listen to anyone else, just listen to me.”

He speaks to His children this way. He tells them, “Just stay and trust me.” He did it then and He does it for us today. So feeling what they felt, understanding what they’re facing, listen to this favorite tweet, this bible verse one more time now that you get the context, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.” Yeah, but we’re hopeless, it doesn’t feel like there is a plan. No, no, no, I know the plans I have for you. “Plans for welfare, not for evil. To give you a future and a hope.” Can you imagine how they received that?

And just as this was for them, so I also believe this is for us. Because we know what it’s like to be hopeless, we know what it’s like to feel captive, we know what it’s like to feel like our future is so unclear. Now there are debates all over the place as to whether this passage is actually for us or not. I heard a pastor this week who said in his sermon very clearly, “This is not for us. It’s only for Israel. And if you love this passage, you’re loving it out of context.” And he just takes your favorite verse andsmashes it.

Now, listen to me very clearly. Hopefully, by this point in the sermon, you figured out that I actually believe the promise or the intended heart behind this passage is for us, but I wanna be clear why. The passage of Jeremiah 29:11, the promise behind it can be applied to our life because of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah 29:11 gets so much more sweet when you couch [SP]it in the Gospel, when you understand that Jesus Christ made a way for this promise to be real in our life. And even though this passage was spoken to Israel first, it gives them this promise of a future land, Jesus made a way for the heart behind this passage to be true in my life.

Jesus even said, the night before He was betrayed, the night that He was betrayed, the night before He was crucified. The Last Supper, He says to everyone, “Listen, I’m making a new covenant with you. All the promises of the old covenant they’re fulfilled in me, for you. I’m making a new covenant with you.” He’s giving us access to the promises that God had made. And if we just have faith in Jesus Christ then the Old Testament promises can be real in our life.

I think about Romans 4, it says, “The promises of God were given to Abraham and all of his descendants.” How? By faith. They had faith and so the promises of God were true for them. Faith in what? Faith in a God that would deliver them. Faith in a God that would give a messiah and guess what? You and I, we inherit the promises of God in the same way by having faith. Not faith in a future messiah, but faith in a messiah that came and made a way for us so that we can have a relationship with God.

See, I believe Jews and Gentiles are now a part of the promise of God. We’ve been grafted in and we can say what the Apostle Paul, what he said in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “All of God’s promises find their yes in Him.” He’s speaking about Jesus Christ. He’s saying all of God’s promises, they find their yes in Jesus, they’re yes, they’re yes, they’re yes, they’re amen, all of those things are true for us. And even if we’re not Jews, even if we’re just Johnny Come Lately Gentiles and we show up to the table of God and we’re accepted into His family, we can trust that these promises can be applied to our life.

Yes, we remember the original context. We don’t forget that. In fact, we respect that and we know the original context even brings more meaning. Why? Because if the same God who kept his promise to these people is our God, then we can trust that He is still reliable and He’s still trustworthy and He’s still good. And He gives all of that to us through Jesus Christ.

So, in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then how do we view Jeremiah 29:11? In light of the truth of Jesus Christ, what does this passage mean for us? There’s three things I think it means. Number one is this, our God knows. He knows you. He knows your situation, He knows the details of your life and He knows what is to come in your life. Listen to the passage, it says, “For I
know the plans I have for you.” It doesn’t matter how you feel about God, if you feel that He’s close. Listen, his presence is far more real than anything you will ever feel.

I had the opportunity, when I was here on staff, to sit with so many of you in the Care and Counseling Ministry and pray with you and cry with you and watch God do unbelievable things in your life. And I trusted that He always would, you know why? Because he knows the details of your life. He knows. And listen, I can be certain of this, that there are still going to be hard things in your life. There are gonna be times that things happen and it doesn’t make sense to you. Your marriage is on the rocks and you can’t get it off the rocks. Your kids have wandered away, they’re living a life totally different than how you raised them. Your singleness is still going on and you never thought you’d be single this long. You go through trials with finances that you go like, “No one ever understands my pain.”

And as many people are in this room today, so are that many trials and different things that come into our life and test our faith time and again. But through all of these, I can say to you with absolute certainty, our God is near and our God sees. And our God knows what’s happening in your life and He cares for you deeply, even more than you might believe it.

And just like the circumstances for ancient Israel, they found themselves in this place thinking God was nowhere. These circumstances were just calling them to greater faith and dependence, that’s the same in your life. The circumstances that come in are just calling you to greater dependence upon Him. Listen, He never said He’d take away the pain, He never said He’d take away your doubt, He never said He’d take away your confusion but He also never said He’d take away His presence. He promises to be an ever-present Father, always there with us. And the goal in the midst of... His goal in the midst of our suffering is this, to make His goodness, His glory, His grace and His salvation known to you every single day.

I wrote this down, I can trust God in my waiting because the end goal is His glory. I can trust him as I wait for clarity, for hope, for a future because He's working it all together for His glory, for my good, yes, but for His glory and that's far more important. I can trust Him. God's never sitting on His throne in heaven and going, “Well, I didn’t see that coming.” Never. His glory is never thwarted, His sovereignty is always prevailing.

Which brings me to another obvious application of Jeremiah 29:11 and that is this, that our God cares. It says that He knows the plans for us but He has plans for welfare, not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. He’s not a distant dad, he’s a present parent in your life. He’s constantly giving you good gifts, don’t you see that in your life? You can look at the faces of your children and see the goodness of God. You can have the provisions in your life of food and a house to live in and see the goodness of God. You can feel the sunshine on your skin and know that God is good. You can look to the salvation you have in Jesus Christ and the wretchedness of your sin and go, “Wow, He’s so good.”

He’s better than any earthly father that has ever existed. And I think we can conclude from Jeremiah 29:11 that it is God’s joy to be good to His people. He loves giving us good gifts. He’s a good dad. Three chapters later, in Jeremiah 32, Jeremiah speaking on behalf of God says, “I rejoice in doing them good.” He loves doing good for us. And what balm to a hurting, waiting, longing soul, to know that God loves to do good things for me.

I wanna ask you a question, a rhetorical question. Don’t answer out loud. Are you frustrated with your life right now? Is there something in your life that you’ve been waiting for, longing for and you feel like God is not bringing it? Were you hoping that your life would look different than it is? You never thought you’d get this far in life and it looks like this, so now you’re frustrated? And have you even prayed about it and sought God and it feels like He’s not answering you, that He’s not doing anything about it, that He doesn’t even have your best interests in mind?

If that’s how you feel, then I’m telling you, that’s exactly how the original receivers of this verse felt. They felt like God didn’t care. They felt like God had abandoned them. But he says in this passage, “My plans are not to harm you.” What comfort to them and what comfort to us. He says, “My plans are not to harm you but to give you a future and a hope.” It should be our routine,
that when we’re anxious over life, we are finding all other ways to calm our anxiousness. Before we pop any Advil for that stress headache, we should stop and go, “He has plans for me, He has plans for me not to harm me, but to give me hope.”

I don’t care how long you’ve been walking with God. I don’t care how mature you think you are in your faith. There are times in your life where you will doubt whether or not He still loves you and He still cares. And I’m saying it to you today, grab His mighty hand, trust His grip. He’s got you.

Charles Spurgeon, one of my favorite preachers of all time...I love Spurgeon, I tried to get my wife to name our kid Spurgeon but she says it sounds like a disease and so she won’t let me name my kid Spurgeon. But he said this, he said, “Consider God’s unchanging care. Though you have changed a thousand times, He has not changed once. He always loves you.” Listen, He loves you. He loves you. He loves you. He loves you and He loves you and He loves you and He loves you and He loves you and He loves you and He loves you and He loves you and He loves you, and He’ll never stop loving you because that’s who He is.

He loves you a hundred percent right now, the way that you are right now, He loves you. Our God knows and our God cares and our God merits our trust in Him every single day. But I wanna leave you with one last very important thing that we cannot skip. It’s too often skipped when we look at this verse. We look at verse 11 and we say, “Wow, He has a future and a hope for me” and we don’t read verse 12 and 13.

But look at verse 12 and 13, look at what it says. It says, “Then, you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me and when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me.” You see, He made this amazing promise, a promise that we would have a future and a hope. But hear in this passage, He gives a greater promise, he promises that if we seek him, we will find him. You see He’s present, He’s not distant. He promises that He’ll listen to us.

The final point is this, our God hears. He knows, He cares but He also hears. It says, “If you pray, I will hear you.” You’ll hear me? I don’t deserve to be heard. I deserved to be banished to the kid’s table, man. Why would you listen to me? But yet, he says, “No, I will hear you”. And it’s more than an invitation to just communicate, he’s saying that I will know you. “Seek me and you will find me”. I will know you and not only that, I will make myself known to you. It’s amazing. Our God hears.

Reminds me of when I was a kid and my dad wanted to prove the point to me that God listens to our prayers. He gathered all of my siblings together, he lined us up and he said, “Guys, this is what I want you to do. I want you to go up into my closet and I want you to pray. You can pray out loud, I just want you to go pray one at a time.” We’re like, “Okay, Dad.” We did whatever he said because ice cream was promised to us at the end. So we go, whatever, we’ll do this.

So we go upstairs and we get in the closet. I get in his closet. Unbeknownst to us, he’d taken a baby monitor and he’d hid it in one of the shoes in the closet. And so we would begin to pray out loud and the whole time he’s listening to our prayers. And then we’d get close to the end and all of a sudden he would speak back through the baby monitor. Kind of creepy, I know, right? But all of a sudden he would speak back and he would say, “Joshua, I hear you. I hear you. I hear your requests and I will answer them. I hear you.”

Listen, the truth is that we have a God who hears us, He knows us and He will answer our us. I want this last thing to be engraved in your mind this morning. I’m gonna read it first and then we’re gonna read it together out loud. “I can trust God in my waiting because He hears and answers”. Let’s read it out loud together, “I can trust God in my waiting because He hears and answers”. Always answers, always. It may not be on your timeline and it may not be in the way that you want Him to answer but listen to me, He always answers. He promises ancient Israel, “If you cry out to me, I will hear you.” And He promises contemporary Christians like us, “If you cry out to me, I will hear you.”

In Jeremiah 29:11, in other places like James 4:8 where He says, “Just seek me”. Just come on. I didn’t move, I never moved. I’m the same yesterday, today and forever. I am a faithful God. You will go through circumstances and you will move and your faith will be stretched but I will never move. I was trying to think of a way to illustrate that and I thought about taking a nail and
pounding it into a board. This firmly placed nail, it’s in there, it’s in the board and let’s let this nail represent God.

God never moves. He’s immutable, which means that He’s unchanging, right? He never moves. And then let’s let my hand represent us, okay. And you and I move. But we have faith in God and we move and as we move and we go through certain circumstances, our faith is stretched, but God never moves. And we change and we come close to God and we may move away from God and circumstances might push us away or certain sins will push us away but all the while, God remains the same. And He says, “Listen, I have a hope for you, I have a future for you, will you just seek me? And if you seek me, you’ll find me. I never move. I’m faithful even when you’re faithless.”

Listen, I say to you this morning, you have a God who loves you. He loves you and He loves you and He loves you. He knows you and He cares for you and He hears you. And He’s inviting you to come and be close to Him. So I say to you the same thing that the Prophet Jeremiah said to ancient Israel, “I declare on behalf of the Lord, I know the plans I have for you. Plans for your welfare, not for evil. Plans to give you a future and a hope”. And all of that is true through our good and gracious savior, Jesus Christ. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for never changing, for always being the same. The same God who was there for Abraham is there for us. The same God who was there for David is there for us. The same God who our Savior Christ prayed to, hears our prayers. Thank you for that. Father, I pray that you will help us, myself and my brothers and sisters in this room, that you will help us have greater dependency upon you, that we will trust you completely. And in moments where we doubt whether you know, whether you care, whether you hear, may we just come back to this place and go, “Wow, He’s still there. He never moves.” Will you stretch our faith, will you grow our faith and will you continue to pull us back to you? I pray, in the name of your Son, who made a way for us to know you, who made a way for us to have hope in the future, it’s in His name we pray. Amen.