

EXCERPT



## **Living in Bonus Time** *Surviving Cancer, Finding New Purpose*

Available January 7, 2020 | \$17, 216 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4594-1

*"Most of us have wrestled with a loved one's death by cancer, and when surprised by life, we celebrate it. But Alec Hill takes us deeper. Diving beneath the surface of the good news of survival, he exposes the emotions and challenges when side-stepping death. . . . Alex teaches the cancer survivor how to thrive in the unexpected gift of bonus years. . . . He teaches us all how to live."*

Sharol Hayner, coauthor of *Joy in the Journey*

## **Bonus Time Is a Season of Grace**

As cancer survivors living in bonus time, we have been given a second chance not only to redefine our purpose in life but to steward our remaining days wisely. Most people tend to view the future as having a long trajectory. But a cancer diagnosis causes time horizons to shrink. Researchers label this recalibration an *existential slap*. Abruptly shifting from expansive time to abbreviated time can be jolting. For someone like me, who used to plan vacations two years in advance, the adjustment has been profound. Such loss of control is often difficult to absorb.

Psychologists have coined a phrase—*life span theory*—to contrast the radically different perspectives of those who expect to live a long time versus those who do not. The latter group includes the elderly, the ill, and those in life-threatening situations (such as Chinese during the bird flu outbreak or West Africans when Ebola spread).

Young adults—who possess a seemingly endless time horizon—prize having novel experiences, meeting new people, and learning new things. Priorities include achievement and exploration. By contrast, those who have come face-to-face with death live more in the now, covet existing relationships, and seek to repeat emotionally satisfying experiences. Unlike twentysomethings, most would rather dine with a close friend than a published author.

Exactly how we redeem time has much to do with our stage of life. Moses crafted Psalm 90—the only poem (of 150) attributed to him—probably as an old man. Of all the themes this great leader could have chosen, he reflected on lifespan. His best remembered words come in the form of a prayer: "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Cancer survivors grasp the import of Moses' petition "to number our days." We yearn to use our remaining time well and not be sidetracked by trivialities. Fully aware of our finiteness, we seek to focus on what's truly important. Our quest is a "heart of wisdom." As Benjamin Franklin remarked: "Do you love life? Then don't squander time, for time is the stuff life is made of."

For many survivors, the prospect of mortality profoundly affects the lifespan calculus. Some cancers are only temporarily beaten back. Others technically go away, but recurrence is an ever-present danger. Still others are completely healed, but collateral damage done by poisonous drugs, radiation, and surgery may trigger new life-threatening maladies. Regular appointments with my oncologist and dermatologist provide reminders of my limited remaining years. I appreciate Billy Graham's response when asked what surprised him most about life: "Its brevity."

How we "redeem time" and "number our days" is, in part, influenced by how we assess our expected lifespan. Shortly before discovering that his cancer was terminal, Dr. Paul Kalanithi decided to allocate his remaining time as follows: "Tell me three months, I'd spend time with my family. Tell me one year, I'd write a book. Give me ten years, I'd get back to treating diseases."



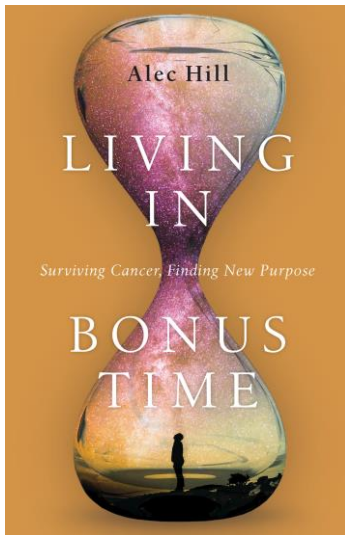
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**Sharol Hayner**, coauthor of *Joy in the Journey*

The ancient Greek language employed two words to define time. The first, *chronos*, describes clock or calendar time—measured linearly in seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years. The second, *kairos*, points to life's grand moments when we say, "my whole life changed when . . ." While the former is scientifically objective and relates to quantity of time, the latter is subjectively rich with meaning and refers to quality of time.

As cancer survivors living in bonus time, we have a rich opportunity to increase our sense of *kairos*. Rather than living mechanically day to day, the gate is open for us to gain a heart of wisdom and joy. An old French saying nicely captures the idea: "God works in moments" (*en peu d'heure Dieu labeure*). A terminally ill British patient recently echoed this sentiment: "I realised I preferred a short life lived well than a long life lived badly." In other words, if forced to choose, she opted for *kairos* over *chronos*.

This is not to say that *chronos* is bad. To the contrary, it is essential. When Mary and I celebrate the date of my transplant with a birthday cake and candles, we are acknowledging its importance. (I must add that it was simply smashing to be three years old again.) *Chronos* is like an empty glass. While it does not satisfy our thirst directly, it provides the vehicle for water to be served. *Kairos* is the water.

After being hit by the existential slap of cancer, many of us regret the amount of *chronos* we wasted prior to diagnosis. But we can't go back. We are different people now. The good news is that we have been given future *chronos*. This presents us with the opportunity to redeem time in at least four ways. First, we learn to savor each moment. Second, we focus more on relationships and less on achievements. Third, we clean up our messes and find greater freedom. Finally, having received so much help from others, we slingshot this goodwill ahead to benefit others.

**Savor moments.** My precancer life was pell-mell. So much in a hurry to charge the next hill, I sadly missed thousands (millions?) of special moments. And now? When I'm taken aback by the autumn glow of a tree, I pause to capture the moment in a photo so I can enjoy it anew later. When a puppy walks by, I bend down to ruffle its fur. When a nephew or niece calls, I don't watch the clock. When Mary asks to spend an extra night camping, I try to accommodate. When two driving routes are options, I often take the slower and more scenic one.

Cherishing the here and now is a grace from God. Being too focused on the future blinds us to what is priceless in this moment. Cancer teaches us that strolling is sometimes better than sprinting. Flexibility becomes a virtue.

—Excerpt taken from chapter 10, "Redeeming Time"

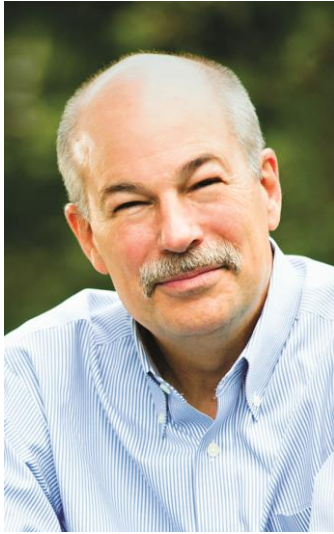


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BIO



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*“With raw emotion and vulnerability, rich wisdom, and biblical truth, Alec Hill confronts some of the biggest challenges of our day—suffering, fear, and control. Through his own cancer story and the stories of others, he inspires us toward growth, even in the most difficult seasons of life. This book will minister to your heart!”*

**Tom Lin**, president and CEO of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

## A Cancer Survivor on a Hero’s Journey

**Alec Hill** is president emeritus of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. His primary focus is mentoring rising leaders. For fourteen years, he served as president before being diagnosed with cancer. He received a successful bone-marrow transplant from his brother Grant as donor. A year of quasi-isolation followed.

Prior to InterVarsity, Alec served as dean of the School of Business and Economics at Seattle Pacific University and professor of law and ethics. SPU has honored him both as Professor of the Year and Alumnus of the Year. He also served as regional director for World Relief.

Alec holds a law degree from the University of Washington as well as an MA in biblical literature and a BA in history from SPU. He has written widely in the fields of business ethics and the First Amendment. His book, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace*, now in its third edition, has been translated into Chinese, Russian, Korean, and Indonesian.

He resides near Seattle with his wife, Mary, whom he has known since they were twelve and eleven years old, respectively. They have two daughters, Laura and Carolyn, both attorneys. He loves road trips, biographies, and the ill-fated Seattle Mariners. He serves as a visiting faculty member at Regent College (Canada) and as an adjunct instructor at SPU. He is also on the board of directors of Christianity Today.



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