

LIVE IN TODAY'S LIGHT

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

The love song God sings over His bride is intended to illuminate the dance of life. Rather than stepping into His arms and gliding through our day, many of us are still too tangled in yesterday's dance to get the footing for today. Or some, like me, are so busy gazing toward tomorrow that we stay tripped up, unable to learn today's steps. I'm personally working on the dance of today and invite you to join me.

I suppose we all toggle back and forth between yesterday, today, and tomorrow in healthy and unhealthy ways. Yesterday has its benefits, and so does tomorrow, but today is our only promise. In the pages to come, we will peer into the advantages and pitfalls of time travel. Hopefully, by the end of the chapter, we will all agree that living in today's light is where our dancing feet belong.

Today:

"Give us this day our daily bread." (Matthew 6:11)

In the Lord's model prayer, the phrase above carries with it wisdom that goes far beyond our physical body's need for food. It speaks to our spirit's need for provision for the day. We need both physical and emotional strength to face the complicated and often chaotic days of this life. God offers all that we need for each day and every "now" moment. The verse below is one I keep posted on my refrigerator:

"...As your days, so shall your strength be." (Deuteronomy 33:25)

When my stepdad passed a few years ago, the hospital chaplain came to speak to my mother. Her wise advice has stuck with me since. She said regarding prayer, "Don't ask what's next. Ask, what now?"

Isn't what's next more often our question? Why is it so difficult for the human mind to remain trained on the day? In my case it's control based, my wanting to have some say over what happens next—as if I'm capable of or qualified for that.

We must learn to live in the day and in the now. Because it requires concerted effort on my part to keep myself focused on today, I begin many mornings asking "What now?" as a reminder to remain in the light of today.

*"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."
(Psalm 23:1-3)*

The verse above is a beautiful picture of walking with God in the present. Notice the present-day terminology. David doesn't say the Lord was my Shepherd or will be my Shepherd. David says the Lord *is* my Shepherd. The action words are present tense: The Lord makes, leads, and restores.

Get to know your Shepherd of today and His moment-by-moment leading. With your mind set on today, you are free from worry and open to all He wants to show you of who He is and how much He loves you.

Yesterday has lost its grip, and tomorrow has no cause for concern for the one who's dancing with Jesus today.

Yesterday:

"Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it?" (Isaiah 43:18-19)

If you could hear the tune playing in my head, you would sing along with me, “Let it go. Let it go.”

Paul says,

“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.” (Philippians 3:13)

I’m with Paul. Forgetting those things which are behind is a true blessing for someone with a past like mine. You may be able to relate and not want to consider past failures. Or, you may love to look back at your glory days and revel in your proud accomplishments. Either way, the past can be a hindrance to your today, just as looking too far ahead can cause you to stumble.

Don’t get me wrong; I’m not hating on yesterday. Yesterday can be an invaluable teacher. It also holds memories of first kisses, weddings, and rocking babies. A happy childhood filled with good memories is a gift from God. When you can look back with fondness at your past and come back to today with gladness, rejoice. There’s nothing wrong with a little time-hop here and there.

Problems arise when our visit to the past becomes a staycation. I have been one and know others who are past-dwellers, people who live in the dimly lit shadows of times gone by. Some of the most profound healing I’ve known with the Wonderful Counselor was experienced by revisiting my past and tracing the roots of some of my present-day weeds to old wounds. I still do it on occasion in a healthy and productive way.

I have shared already how at first I wouldn’t ask God the Father for much. I traced the root of that behavior back to my reluctance to ask my earthly dad for things. I guess I didn’t want to be a bother to my dad and carried that same feeling into my walk with God. It was helpful that the Lord used this revelation from the past to open my eyes in the present.

Every weed of today has its roots in yesterday, even if it’s not a far-off yesterday. To illustrate: During a hectic season when many demands are pulling at me from different directions, I may eventually find myself angry at every small interruption in life. Something insignificant can happen that causes me to react in an unfitting-for-the-situation kind of way. The one little thing that triggered my blowup isn’t really the issue. It was the many little things over the course of days, weeks, or months that compounded until a weed sprouted, and I reacted rather than responded. We all have those seasons and can recognize how a building up of yesterday’s stress can affect our today.

I encourage you to visit yesterday in pursuit of healing for today’s weeds, just don’t pull up a chair and stay for too long. A look back is only intended to assist you today.

A good example of looking back with safety is recorded in Joshua 4. The Israelites were told to set up memorial stones after God parted the Jordan River for them to cross.

“Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: ‘When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall let your children know...” (Joshua 4:21-22)

A look back can:

- Remind you of times when you noticed God’s activity. I actually have my own collection of Stones of Remembrance that I keep as a reminder. Each has a small picture painted on it to remind me of some significant moment in my walk with Jesus. Remember the story of how God took the taste for alcohol away from me? I have a stone with a little skunk painted on it that a lady gave me after I shared that story at an event.
- Help in your emotional healing process as you trace your own weeds back to past hurts.
- Teach you the hazards you need to avoid in your present.

What the past isn’t designed for is defining who you are. Every day you are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The years I spent looking back, agreeing with the adversary that I was still that woman, were stolen and unproductive years. When you’re convinced you are who you were, you can’t possibly be who God has made you to be.

To look back at God's goodness is therapeutic and gives you hope when you're facing the worst odds. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), so yes, remember His deliverance in times past as a way to be reassured of His deliverance today.

Tomorrow:

As promised, I will pick up where I left off in "Live in Safety." Remember that I mentioned how an extended visit to the future will only disable, disillusion, and disappoint, and how I tend to look toward the future at the expense of my sanity today? Let's take into consideration how dwelling on the future can negatively impact our today.

Disable

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6:34)

Contemplating all that the future may hold can lead to disabling fear. Even the most faith-filled Christian tends to struggle with fears over money, health issues, and the future for their children. There are just too many things that can go wrong.

The Bible addresses the topic of "do not fear" more than 365 times, so we can see it's an issue close to the heart of a Father who knows our propensity to fear the unknown.

Fear isn't my default normally, but I come from a long line of fear-filled women, so you can believe I know what it looks like. My mother and grandmother were two of the most anxious people I have ever known. I say were because my grandmother has passed from this world, and fear has lost its death grip on my mother. Death grip isn't an exaggeration as even my mother will tell you. Her fear of impending events once had her so bound that she lost many todays while worrying about all the tomorrows. Her healing came through the work of the Holy Spirit as she began to walk closer with Jesus after her husband passed.

If fear over tomorrow has you in its death grip, you have one place to run—to Jesus.

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

This is a familiar verse, one in which Jesus calls you to come to Him, not only for salvation, but also for daily reassurance that He is still God, and He is still in control. Jesus will take from you the burden of fear and offer you rest in return.

Disillusion

Every generation says something similar: "Back in my day, things were so much simpler, so much better." My parents say it. I tell my kids that. To see the deterioration of the world, how our culture's moral landscape is so different now, we can only become disillusioned when looking at the nation we will someday hand over to our children. It's easy to lose hope.

Political and social arguments are growing louder and more heated all the time. You can't read your social media feed without noticing the escalation. For a natural hermit like me, that only makes me want to close myself off from the world even more. No matter how much we try to buffer ourselves from it all, we can't help but see that things are only getting worse.

All I can do about the future of this nation and world is to try my best to focus on my present. I know my call is to help lead others closer to Jesus. If I can do that, then I've affected the future of those I reach and the ones who surround the one walking nearer to Jesus. It's the same with you. If you are walking out your call in this life, then you are positively affecting the future of all those in your path.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33)

This verse is our reminder that we must seek a deeper spiritual life, one that doesn't settle for the ordinary. That can only be done by living in the present. A deeper spiritual life will produce fruit that will impact the lives of others. Where the future disillusioned, the present enlightens. That's where you will find light for your own journey, in your present day. If you are truly concerned about the future of our world, then train your attention back on what you are called to do today.

Disappoint

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." (Proverbs 27:1)

I recently took a long look toward the future and tried to determine how God might make things work out in a particular matter. I began envisioning how I wanted it to turn out and allowed my mind to run wild. Speculation became expectation. Next thing I knew, I believed my own version and was disappointed when my way wasn't God's way. To be completely honest, I was more than disappointed; I was devastated and felt let down by God. But how could I be let down when God hadn't set up those unmet expectations in the first place?

Unmet expectations can wreak havoc on our faith. The older I get, the more I realize the danger of having expectations at all. Maybe it's the writer in me, but I sure can create a world in which my expectations eclipse reality. When I live in the present day, only then are my expectations kept realistic. A mind focused on today doesn't have time to forecast a future.

I'm not suggesting a negative outlook, but I am proposing that we manage expectations and ensure they are based on our only sound point of reference: God, through His Word.

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

The one thing you can expect with certainty is that the Father who loves you has better-than-you-can-imagine things prepared. They just may not look like what you ask for or expect.

To look ahead and try to determine what's to come is too heavy a burden for any of us. God spoke into my spirit recently saying, "I carry the future. You just carry today." I knew what He meant. He still technically carries today, but I do carry my cross of today. I have responsibilities and demands on my time. For a planner like me, narrowing down my concerns to one day at a time is freeing.

Doesn't that set you free as well, knowing you only have to make it through today?

Tomorrow is a darkened doorway, one that will only be illuminated once the door opens. Stop trying to jiggle the doorknob in order to enter a place you don't yet belong.

For us future-dwellers, how can we effectively keep our mind trained on today?

I have begun a new exercise each morning. I scope out my day, what I hope to accomplish, and then set no further expectations than that. Outcomes will be what they are. When I don't get something done due to life's normal interruptions, I try not to allow it to affect me and simply put it on the list for tomorrow.

I'm in my fifties and just now realizing that what I've always considered to be interruptions to my day aren't interruptions. To pause my plans unexpectedly to help others is the business of doing life. I used to get so frustrated over a last-minute phone call where someone needed me to drop what I was doing and run to their aid. Okay, I can still get frustrated, but at least now I understand that this is part of living and loving others.

Jesus wasn't kidding when he said, "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).

Each day requires my all, so why spend today's energy on tomorrow when I know tomorrow will make its own demands?

Another good mental exercise is to focus on three feet around me, no more than that. On a recent episode of a TV show about Navy Seals, a character told of when he was training to rock climb and how he became paralyzed by fear. His instructor told him to just focus on three feet above him, to climb that, and then to tackle the next three feet.

I took that to heart. Now I look at today, quickly scan the week or maybe the month to come (my next three feet) to allow for tentative planning, then train my eyes back on today.

Earlier I admitted to feeling let down by God, but even at the time I knew God wasn't to blame. Maybe to say I was let down by my faith in what I thought would happen would be more accurate. For several weeks I took quite the tumble spiritually. I wasn't someone I even recognized.

Normally, I feel like Joshua, ready to engage the enemy in order to take possession of the Promised Land. When Joshua returned from the land of Canaan with the other spies, he believed the enemy was surmountable. Not the others who went with him, though. They considered themselves grasshoppers in comparison and gave a bad report (Numbers 13).

I became the other spies for a season, complaining and fearful and unwilling to take additional steps in faith. Every obstacle in my path felt monumental, while I felt like a wee, little grasshopper.

I kept wondering where bold and willing-to-take-risks Lisa had gone. Normally I'm prepared to rattle the gates of hell. What had happened? The enemy fed me a bushel full of lies, and I ate. He towered over me, telling me that I was insignificant and had nothing to offer. He mocked all I had accomplished and assured me I was on a crash course with failure.

It was more than the enemy's assault that kept me trembling in a corner, binging on movies rather than writing. The reason I lost sight of myself was that I had lost sight of Jesus. He is who I am now. In Him I live and move and have my being (Acts 17:28). So because I couldn't see Him, I couldn't see the me He had been raising up this past decade.

Spiritually, I wasn't boldly approaching the throne any longer. I was mumbling faraway prayers in doubt. When I understood that, I took that one step back toward Him, and all the doubts began to fade. I accepted the fact that I had allowed my visit to the future to trip me up.

I see a trend emerging: Have you noticed how many recent spiritual valleys I keep writing about? The process of writing this book seems to keep me tossed about between highs and lows. After my many personal stories that seem to litter chapter after chapter, I see the hand of God crafting in-the-moment experiences for me to write from an up-close perspective. I'm not standing on a faraway hill looking at a valley that I visited years ago. I've been trudging along through valley after valley while writing.

Maybe through some of my stories you see yourself and your own struggles as you learn each dance. While dancing out my faith, it's much easier to relate to the in-process dancer next to me rather than the one who seems to be perfected, knowing all the steps. So here I am, flailing around on the dance floor next to you, making you feel right at home. You're welcome.

The concept of an internal, spiritual work comes to mind. What if God is using this book to grow me by making me sit down and write out what I've experienced and what I've learned? Am I willing to obey and keep writing if this only reaches me?

That possibility would normally bring deep disillusionment after all the time I've invested in this project, but not now, not in light of how God has framed this in my mind.

That God would spend a year and a half with such intention to deepen my faith and remind me how He has loved me with true intimacy over the years is the sweetest thought to have surfaced in my mind in ages. Now that's love! If He thinks I'm worth this much time and effort, then I can only love Him more for His relentless love and pursuit of my whole heart.

Since you're reading this as a completed book, you can know that He has purpose for these words to reach you. Somewhere amidst the pages, He has something for you to learn or remember. He considers you worth His time and effort. Not just effort reflected in this book, but in His relentless love and pursuit of your whole heart all along.

With skillful precision He crafts our lives in such a way that we are reshaped into the likeness of His Son, just as a potter does with a handful of clay (Jeremiah 18). Be the clay in the Potter's hands. Allow Him to complete His work within you. Walk with Him in the present and through the trials of your current circumstances and know He has a purpose for all that you endure. Trust what He is calling you to do today, even when the outcome seems pointless. God's redeeming work within you is worth the best efforts of you both. And who knows, maybe the work you and I accomplish in each of our todays will touch the life of another in such a way that they will see that They. Are. Loved.

TODAY'S LIGHT TAKEAWAY

"Yesterday has lost its grip, and tomorrow has no cause for concern for the one who's dancing with Jesus today."
– *You. Are. Loved.*

Key Point

Today: Focus on what now rather than what's next.

- 1) Are you a today dweller, or are you known to time hop in unhealthy ways? If you tend to time hop, how does that affect your present reality?

- 2) What is your now? What does the Lord have in your life and on your plate that you know He is calling you to focus on? Consider family, career, and ministry responsibilities.

- 3) Read Psalm 23:1-3 aloud, saying "today" at the end of each complete phrase. In your days to come, what can you do differently to keep your mind fixed on the promise of today? How might the practice of "What now, Lord?" help you to better walk with your Shepherd of today?

Key Point:

Yesterday: A look back can remind, help, and teach.

- 4) When you look at your past, are you more prone to dwell on your glory days and proud accomplishments or on hardships and past failures? What are the pros and cons of each?

Pros: _____

Cons: _____

- 5) Yesterday can be an invaluable teacher. List a few vital lessons that yesterday has taught you.

- 6) Problems arise when our visit to the past becomes a staycation. How can you maintain a healthy balance when looking back to learn from the past?

Key Point

Tomorrow: Focusing on tomorrow can disable, disillusion, and disappoint.

- 7) Fear over tomorrow can disable. Are there any future fears that cause you crippling anxiety? What truth does Jesus share in Matthew 6:34?

- 8) In our chaotic last-days world, disillusionment is a tactic of the enemy, one intended to keep us still and silent. How can the simplicity of answering your call and fulfilling the works God has for you (Ephesians 2:10) be your way of pushing back against the rising darkness?

- 9) Disappointment can wreak havoc on your faith. When things don't turn out as you envision, consider that you may have forecast a future that God never planned. How can 1 Corinthians 2:9 encourage you?

- 10) We must make tentative plans. How can you safely glance at the future to make wise decisions today?

You. Are. Worth. It.

- 11) I mentioned how God considers you worth His time and effort as evidenced by His faithful love for you and relentless pursuit of you. How does it impact you to know He has been chasing after you all along?

- 12) The worth of an item is determined by the price someone is willing to pay. Do you realize just how valuable you must be to God that He would pay with His Son's life to make you His? Write your prayer of gratitude below.
