

# Today is Most Noble

God holds the future and redeems all of yesterday.

But today is closer to me.

What an amazing concept today, right now, really is. Today- I hope you aren't planning a siege on your enemy. I hope you aren't judging the person in the room. I hope you aren't swallowed up in regret. I hope you aren't poisoning your time with trivial, toxic thoughts of your own wealth, vanity or scheming revenge. I hope you are in the moment for this moment fashions eternity.

Today is a gift which is moving forward faster than thoughts or plans

Today is where i am right here and right now.

Today is an opportunity to change the little things

Today is closer. tomorrow is a promise and yesterday is an eternity from anything I could attain.

Today is most noble!

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# The World's First Smart Phone

Siri and I are having issues. I believe I lean too much on her and I forget that she does *not* have the capability of an administrative assistant, as most commercials would assume. She'll take me to Cracker Barrel when I want to go to Kroger. She'll call my blood donation center when I ask her to call my wife. She scheduled me for a dental appointment for April 17<sup>th</sup>

2018 when I asked her to put it on my calendar for April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018. It embarrasses Darlene. She says that shouting at it will not make it better, especially at the church welcome center. I've tried all the hacks I've heard of. Checking my settings, powering down the phone, tilting the phone at a 40-degree angle, reciting the pledge of allegiance to it ten times. But the phone remains as mystified by me as I am of it.

There's a smart phone in the Bible. Sort of... I found it in Numbers 22 without the aid of the "find-my-phone" app on my computer. Actually it was a donkey-an upgraded smart donkey to be exact. For a few moments, this Shrek-like donkey spoke when his navigation was questioned. The owner of this *smart donkey*, Balaam was commissioned to place a curse on the people of God, but evidently the smart-donkey knew better and refused to go a step forward. He wouldn't cooperate- much like my smart-phone in downtown Dallas.

Balaam shouted words similar to the words I have said to my phone a thousand times:

*"You made me look like a fool. If I had a sword in my hand, I'd kill you now!"*

Numbers 22:29 (CSB)

And for the first time in the history of the animal kingdom, a *donkey* replied,

*"But the donkey said, "Am I not the donkey you've ridden all your life until today? Have I ever treated you this way before?" (Verse 30)*

Just a note here- This is exactly the kind of sentence structure Siri uses when I realize that she led me down a dead end road on the wrong side of town. Who knew that a donkey's first sentence would be so grammatically correct? This causes me to conclude that donkeys are smarter than we give them credit. The next time someone calls me a donkey or other words

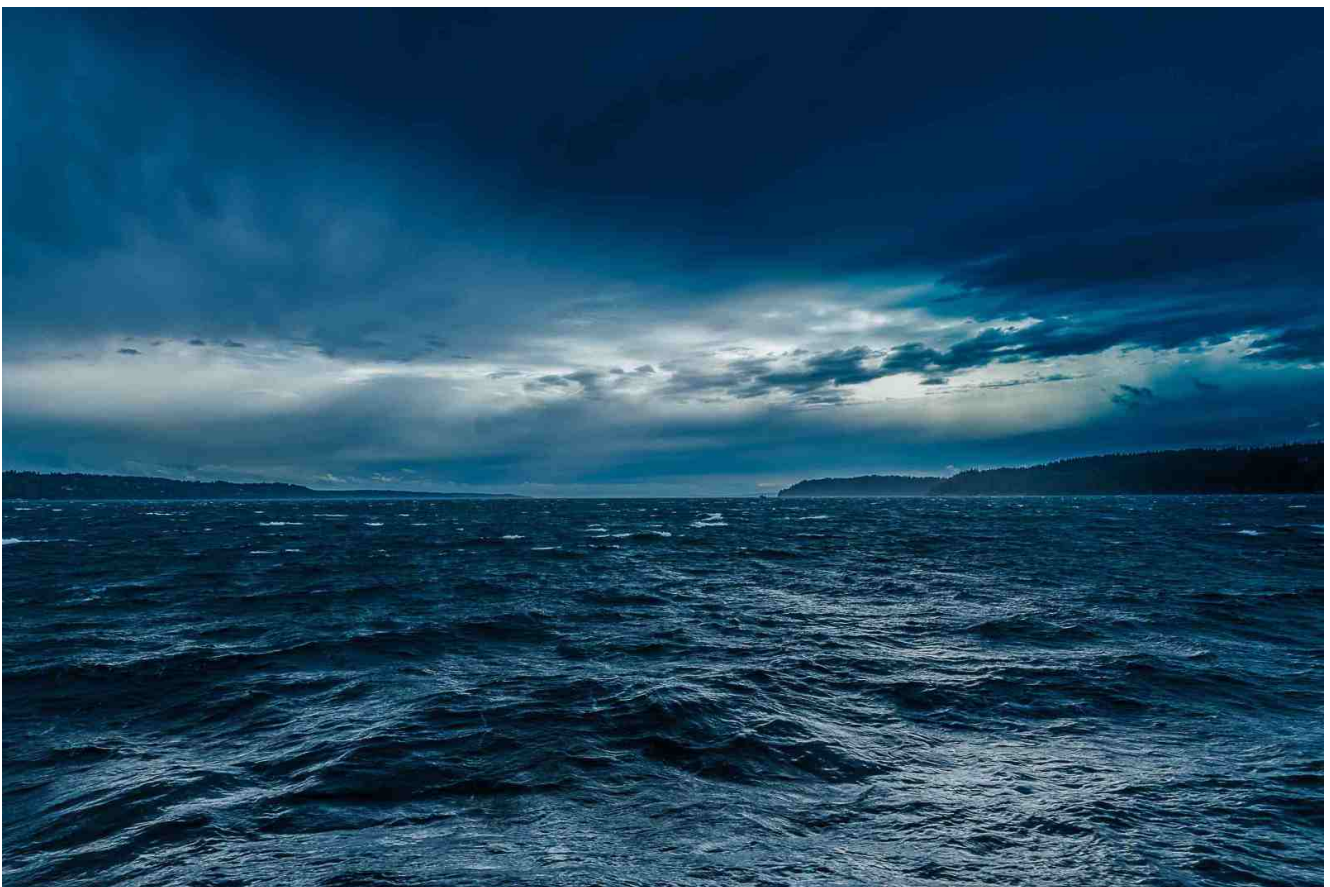
synonymous to *donkey* during rush hour traffic, I'm going to take it as a compliment.

The entire story is proof me that the real inventor of the smart phone is God. It just came in the form of a donkey 3500 years earlier.

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## Cycling – Walking Them Home



*Dad: Do you have the car? Are we going home? Me: No, we can't go home. You're in the hospital. Dad: Oh. When are we going to go? Me: I'm not sure. We have to find a place for you to*

*rehab. Dad: Can we go home. Where's your car? Me: Dad, we aren't going [...]*

via [Cycling – Walking Them Home](#)

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## **A Prayer of Collective Repentance**

Lord, have mercy upon us. We have shouted more than we have listened. We have looked through rage and defiance and have brutalized our brothers and sisters. We have forgotten your Word, which calls upon us to turn the other cheek, to defend those who are on the bottom rung, and to live at peace as long as it depends on us.

We have politicized the Bible and have taken scripture out of context to reframe it so that it fits our personal worldview.

Forgive us, Lord. We've forgotten that our kingdom is not of this world, that we are all aliens, and that we have a greater work to fulfill. This work is a labor of love, and if we are to be honest with You, we have not been laboring very well. As a nation we have sold our birthright for a crude pot of rage.

Lord of Compassion, we have forgotten what it means to listen to our brothers' words. We have discounted their stories and we have lacked the empathy that leads to understanding. May we weep for America as You wept for Jerusalem.

Prince of Peace, we need You now more than ever. We don't need editorials, rants, or bullhorns. We just need You. Lord, shatter our pride. Make quick work of our prejudice. Keep us from coded words, false pretences, and sarcasm. Hold a mirror

to our souls and collectively, let us see our iniquity.

Lord Jesus, Son of God may we look at the cross and remember how You suffered under the greatest, deepest triangulation of injustice, betrayal and vitriolic anger while praying, "Forgive them." Teach us how to love like that.

May the Church lead out in love and courage. May we bind the wounds of the brokenhearted and diffuse the anger of a dying culture. Transform us Lord. Teach us how to season our words with grace.

We pray this in the Name of the One who wept,

Amen...

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## When Jesus is in the House

Just another time to worship... Then, suddenly, something happens. Flecks of the ceiling are falling on the teacher's shoulder. The flecks turn into chunks and out of a gaping hole a paralyzed man is lowered down by four guys in the first elevator in church history. The man is healed and the people went away amazed saying, "We've never seen anything like that before!" If only church was like that more often. Drug addicts are welcomed and then healed. Homes are restored. The prodigal son walks in and the down the aisle smothered by a family weeping for joy. These things happen. I've witnessed them. It's then that we can truly say, We've never seen anything like this before. Why don't we see it more often? I think it has a lot to do with two things: Very few people think creatively about how to get their friends to Jesus, like those

four guys did in the story. And, sadly, I think we lose sight of the fact that Jesus, the wonder-maker and the game-changer is in the house.

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## Grace is on a Family Tree

My friend loves Jesus.

That sounds commonplace, doesn't it?

It becomes less pedestrian when I tell you that his Mom died a drug addict and his father was a devout atheist. My friend was gloriously saved at the age of 10 at a Vacation Bible School event and never looked back. This. Makes. No. Sense. They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree but this apple fell off the tree rolled down the hill, was picked up by a pilot and flew across the ocean! (Figuratively speaking, of course.) And believe me, I don't have enough white space here to chronicle the entire sordid tale. His story is a monument to the fact that God can save anybody He wants to save, no matter how messed up the family tree.

The New Testament begins with a family tree that had a number of ugly branches. Matthew 1 tells us that in Jesus' lineage are a number shady characters including a prostitute, daughter of incest, an adulterer, a lying brother, lots of cautionary tales and ultimately an scandalous unwed pregnancy. It's almost like God wanted to say from the start that this Gospel is all about grace and not about our upbringing. God isn't as interested in your family history. He's interested in what happens next. And when it comes to transformation, what happens next is glorious. He flips the script with grace. It's His specialty. Never count yourself or your family out because of what happened yesterday. It's an insult to the power of God

when you do.

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## When You Say Farewell

We all learn that people come and people go. You could lose the one you love in the turn of a road, in a sudden bend in the stream and life in its infinite mystery vanishes like the morning dew in the warm break of dawn.

The universality of loss is indellable. I remember dropping my best friend off at the airport in Nashville. I can still see him smile and casually wave goodbye as I pulled away merging back into traffic. I had no idea that would be the last time I'd ever see him. That's life. And that's death.

Accidentally or intentionally...

Sweetly or somberly...

Long farewells or brief goodbyes...

People go away...

Something inside says this is not the way it should be.

Others turn their backs. This is the lesson we all learn. Some graves are not found in cemeteries. They are cloistered inside our souls. Through emotional illness, anger, misunderstanding or fate we lose and say farewell to those we love. There are no ceremonies to mark their departures. But there is One that hears the sound of our weeping and whispers, "Me too."

The creator of reunions... He is the One in the gap of our disconnection.

His name is Jesus.

The Matchless King who wrapped himself  
in a garment of earthly flesh

Jesus

The Christ

And Peter said, "You are Christ the Son of the Living God."

Jesus

The Anointed One sent from the throne of the Father

Jesus

The Lord,

Whose arrival was announced by a host of angels.

The Lord – the Master of our lives.

Jesus

Our peace... not a state of mind but a Person. For He is Peace.

Oh war-torn world, prepare yourself for the coming of the  
Prince of Peace.

Jesus

Wonderful Savior- If you have ever come to the realization of  
who we are and who He is, and what He does, how can you doubt  
that

Jesus' Name is Wonderful... Counselor The God who listens and  
directs.

He is light in darkness,

Voice in silence, and wisdom in a land of lostness.

Jesus

The Mighty God

Jesus

The Everlasting Father

Have you ever mourned the loss of a father or mother? See the  
joy of a Father who never dies. He lives forever.

Jesus

The Word of God

In the beginning was the Word

and the Word was with God



and the Word was  
Jesus  
The fourth man in the furnace  
Jesus  
The Friend  
The One who never leaves.

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## The Two Questions that He Keeps Asking

After the resurrection, Jesus returns to the disciples and sets his attention on Peter. You remember Peter. He's the cussing disciple. The sword wheeling, water stumbling, denier whose tongue sprinted a few miles ahead of his brain on any given Sunday.

Jesus gives the disciples a little fishing advice that produces a record catch and then Peter jumps out of the boat leaving the haul to his buddies. That is **SO** Peter, isn't it?

In the middle of this breakfast He asks Peter three times: "Peter, son of Jonah? Do you love me?"

The first time he asks, "Do you love me more than these?"

This is where I could have used a little more narrative information from the writer John. He obviously must have been gesturing to the fish, or the boats, his favorite lures, the disciples, or the water. We don't know. But I like that we don't know. It leaves a mystery and every time I think about it, I think about my own "more than these" things.

I open up my retirement balance sheet. And I hear Him whisper,

“Do you love me more than these?”

I open the refrigerator. He whispers again, “Do you love me more than these?”

I think about my family and friends. It gets deadly serious as He whispers, “Do you love me more than these?”

Just the question, “Do you love me?” What a soul searching question it is! Do I really love Him. I mean, hail or high water, do I love Him? Do I love Him when I am broke, mistreated, demoted, deleted, disparaged, rejected... Do I love Him?

The second question comes after Jesus infers that he (Peter) is going to die. (Note to reader: You, too, will die) Peter looks over at John, perhaps hoping to change the subject. No one wants to talk about their own death. He turns to John and asks, “Hey Jesus, what about John?”

Jesus then says, “What is that to you?” In other words, “Peter, stop looking around. I’m talking about you and you only right now.” I think the question inside the question is this: “Do you trust me?”

Jesus is asking me that same question. “Do you trust me?”

Those two questions:

Do you love me?

Do you trust me?

Those are the questions he whispers to me and you every day.

When He sees us fretting, anxious, conflicted, and disappointed by our careers, our lives, our future, our kids, our marriage, our finances, EVERYTHING.

He’s asking those two questions.

Stop reading this for a moment and hear Him whisper to you:

Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?  
Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?  
Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?  
Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?  
Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?  
Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?  
Do you love me?  
Do you trust me?

I don't know where you are, but your love and trust fascinates Him. It's why He created you. He created you so that He could love You and take care of You. I want to see you and me grow up so that we can enter into a relationship of love and trust. He wants both of those from you, more than He wants you to sing beautifully, speak in tongues, heal the sick, or achieve greatness in His Name. Getting your theology right about free-will, Calvinism, or how many angels can dance on the head of a pin— none of that is in the same area code of these two important questions.

He wants our love and He wants our trust.

So do you love Him?

Do you trust Him?

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# A Sacred Connection

The child arrives on the planet and a new daddy shouts, and the grandparents weep with joy, but the mother is the first to see her child deeply. Children are born and you don't have to teach a mother or child how to feel love. They bring their love with them.

She sees her baby and realizes that the old saying is true- babies come through us but not from us. And God whispers the words He always whispers following another stroke of wonder: "It is good." He created the child and He created the relationship. There is a sacred connection between mother and child.

And the journey begins on that first day of life and the journey is filled with a vast collection of memories:

The first birthday cake

Mud pies

First steps

Bike rides on Christmas mornings

Lines on the door frame celebrating growth

Time out in the corner of a kitchen

A sudden illness followed by floods of concern

Healing and overwhelming relief

T-ball games

Goldfish funerals

Messy rooms

Adolescent brooding

Consoling heartbreaks

Failures and successes

ACTs And SATs and waiting nervously for results

Unexpected tears upon the realization that the journey into adulthood would soon be over.

The mother and the child

Their connection constantly changing and shifting over 17 years.

And as they back out of the driveway, boxes and memories stuffed away in the trunk, one last time they are off. This time not to camp, or a game, or a weekend but rather to a world of adventure that mothers and father release them to experience. They'll be back again and again- but the journey has begun. Their daily presence is gone.

*But not the love.*

A mother's love lasts, from birth, to childhood, through the teen years and beyond...

Endlessly unfolding...

The love never changes.

*It is held in the mighty hands of Jesus.*

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# Sometimes It's Hard to Sing

Every now and then, pain steals something so important to us. External forces or internal conflicts arise and over time, we discover that we have lost our song. How is it possible to sing when our hearts are heavy and our hope wanes?

You lose a friend to cancer. You are unjustly attacked. A child turns his back on you. Your heart is broken by the one person who promised to be with you until death. You lose a job, a dream or a destiny.

If that's where you've been or where you are, allow me to share a little blues from an old songbook called Psalms:

*"By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. There we hung up our lyres on the poplar trees... how can we sing in a faraway land."*

Psalms 137:1-2 & 4

It happens.

## **Our song is gone.**

Psalms 137 is a snapshot in the story of God's people. We see life knocking the wind out of their lungs and now they enter into bondage on the wrong side of Babylon's rivers. The songwriter asks a question we ask ourselves: "How can you sing in the middle of defeat and loss?"

In the seams of this songbook called Psalms, we hear deep guttural cries of the brokenhearted. We've all been there. Maybe it's a friend, maybe it's a family member, an accountability partner or a maybe it's you. We have all experienced a time when we turn off the music because darkness flooded into the cracks of our souls. The Bible is filled with these dark moments. They are not censored out and hidden

obscurely. They are front and center. Why? *Maybe* it's because God wants us to know that in our darkest times, we enter into the fellowship of strugglers. We are not alone. We've never been alone. There's one thing for sure in this life: none of us gets a pass on adversity.

There is nothing more healing during a time of pain and sorrow than to connect with someone you love and hear the words "Me too." It's so simple! To find someone who's willing to admit that they struggle just as you struggle becomes an amazing healing agent. It takes the sting from the pain we face. We often find that our dirges become anthems of grace.

If you've lost your song I want to invite you:

- Sing your way out of it, even if it means singing the blues. (Psalm 30:11)
- Thank God for what you do have and don't focus on scarcity. (Philippians 4:6)
- As much as you'd prefer to climb under a rock, connect with someone who can support you. (Ecclesiastes 4:10-12)
- Don't look for the blame. It's a fool's errand. (Genesis 3:12)
- Rejoice in knowing that this event or circumstance will strengthen your character.
- Trust God's work in you. (Philippians 1:6)
- Do not internalize. Let yourself off the hook. (Romans 1:8)
- Be mindful of your body. Rest, nourish, and breathe deep. (Psalm 46:10)
- Don't just pray for escape, pray for God's glory to be revealed in the midst of it all. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- Don't get paranoid. There isn't a target on your back. Really. (Romans 8:31)

Finally, I want to challenge all of us on the struggle bus to pray honestly. God hates a fake smile as much as anyone. Speak the truth. Make it plain. Don't hold back. God is not shaken

by your anger or emotions. He's a God who wrestles.

*"One bold message in the Book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your disappointment—he can absorb them all." Phillip Yancey*

In despair, look for a friend and be a friend. A friend who can enter into the sacred space without breathing a word of advice or analysis. Aah... That is a friend to keep and to be. Chances are you know what to do. You just need someone to walk alongside you as you search for your song.

Sooner or later you'll find your jam.