

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!

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.

Containers, We Are

This reading could be utilized as a solo reading, duet, or group reading.

Reader 1: "For we do not preach ourselves."

Reader 2: We don't strut our talents.

Reader 1: We don't flaunt our riches.

Reader 2: We don't tout our strategy.

Reader 1: We don't sell our style.

Reader 2: We don't rely on our wisdom.

Reader 1: We preach "Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves" as the 21st-century representatives of Christ.

Reader 2: Anything more is tainted;

Reader 1: anything less is obsolete,

Reader 2: We speak Jesus into the darkness of a lost, chaotic world.

Reader 1: "For God, who said,"

Reader 2: "'Let light shine out of darkness.'"

Reader 1: That same God "made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Reader 2: So who are we?

Reader 1: We are the containers:

Reader 2: we are the tank,

Reader 1: we are the glass,

Reader 2: we are the bowl.

Reader 1: We have our cracks;

Reader 2: we have our imperfections;

Reader 1: we have our nicks.

Reader 2: Where is our value?

Reader 1: Where is our worth?

Reader 2: Where is our glory?

Reader 1: Look inside our hearts?

Reader 2: If you see Christ at work,

Reader 1: if you hear the sound,

Reader 2: if you feel the beat,

Reader 1: if you see the shine of Christ,

Reader 2: you've seen our glory.

Reader 1: "We have this treasure in jars of clay"

Reader 2: "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

Reader 1: We don't boast in anything outside of Christ.

Reader 2: How foolish,

Reader 1: how unthinkable,

Reader 2: to claim that we are anything outside of Christ.

Reader 1: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed."

Reader 2: Who can crush the power of God?

Reader 1: We are perplexed from time to time:

Reader 2: we doubt,

Reader 1: we disappoint,

Reader 2: we fail,

Reader 1: we have skinned knees

Reader 2: and calloused hands.

Reader 1: We run into our share of walls, obstacles, and predicaments:

Reader 2: "perplexed, but not in despair";

Reader 1: down, but not out;

Reader 2: "persecuted, but not abandoned";

Reader 1: "struck down, but not destroyed."

Reader 2: Because we are vessels of God's glory.

Reader 1: So, it's OK if I fail.

Reader 2: If we speak the truth, and no one accepts it.

Reader 1: If we run through the fire, and we are left without a friend.

Reader 2: If we are far from the applause of our peers and families.

Reader 1: If no one sees a thing we do for Christ,

Reader 2: it doesn't matter.

Reader 1: We don't have to obsess over how we look,

Reader 2: what we accomplish,

Reader 1: where we are sent.

Reader 2: The only thing that matters, at the end of the race, is what we carry, and into whose arms we fall when we gasp our last breath and cross the finish line.

Reader 1: As long as "we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus,"

Reader 2: "so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."

Reader 1: We are infinitely more than what we could be on our own.

Reader 2: "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body."

Reader 1: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away."

Reader 2: The sands of time keep pouring down.

Both: "Yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Reader 2: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

Reader 1: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen."

Reader 2: "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Reader 1: The glory of Jesus Christ.

Reader 2: The passion of the call.

Reader 1: The freedom of His grace:

Reader 2: His time,

Reader 1: His plan,

Reader 2: His heart,

Reader 1: His home.

Reader 2: So what do you say, oh jars of clay?

Reader 1: Let's pop off the lid and let His power flood every corner of our souls.

Reader 2: It's not a cakewalk,

Reader 1: but it's not a funeral dirge, either.

Reader 2: It is eternal.

Reader 1: It is thrilling.

Reader 2: It is the real thing.

Reader 1: It is beyond us.

Reader 2: It is through us.

Reader 1: It is for us.

Reader 2: It is before us.

Reader 1: So open wide every chapter of today;

Reader 2: open the windows

Reader 1: and fasten your seat belts.

Reader 2: You contain the heart,

Reader 1: the DNA,

Both: the mind of the everlasting Champion!

Amos Today

(Based on Amos 5:18-24)

Woe and pity to the theological geniuses! The ones that gaze

upon the charts of dispensational prophecy. The ones that spend their days arguing their religious apologetics on social media without lifting a finger to help strugglers. Woe to you who parrot political arguments and lust for salacious scandals. Why do you crave His coming and yet fail Him with your heart?

For you it will be darkness. Is this really what you want? You'll look as if you've seen a marauding bear or a hissing snake. What did you expect? Light? You feed the darkness.

I hate your worship. I find no truth in your frowns and fury. You bore me with your relevance and clever talk. You infuriate me with your boredom and tradition. Likewise, to those who think the frenetic pounding worship with lights and fog will get my attention, it has. But not the kind of attention you would desire. Away with the electric guitars and drums! And away with your organs and litanies! Away with your assumption that your performance will be counted as righteousness. Send all this madness away and come to Me with justice.

Regard the needs of hungry

Contend for the health of the poor.

When you run to them you are running to me.

Everything else is a pointless charade and a foolish liturgy.

Instead let justice roll like the currents of a mighty stream.

Seek the wanderers in darkness on the edge of town and bring them into Light.

I will meet you in Mercyland.

36 Names I Call Him

He's my secret Treasure amidst the lies of gold
The Captain of my vessel, the Guardian of my soul
The Champion of my battles, my Warrior in the night
My Guardian, Provider, within the fiercest fight
He's Architect and Builder of my forever home
A Friend that's like none other. I never walk alone.
He speaks when I am speechless, my Compass when I'm lost
Forgiver of my cruel debt despite the brutal cost
His love song is redemption, a Troubadour of grace
When I'm lost and lonely, He is my Resting Place
When everyone deserts me, He is a faithful Friend
The Seer of my journey- beginning to the end.
The Hero on His stallion, the Warrior on the hill.
Holy Justice Giver, with a master swordsman's skill.
My articulate Defender speaks pro-bono in my stead
My Guide through lands of dragons, and by His hand I'm led
He is Enough for yesterday and forever more
My Brother and my Father, my Refuge and my Door.
He is the holy Poet, His sonnet is the sky!
The perfect, true Philosopher. He knows the reasons why.
Far more than any force on earth and higher than the sun
And when we think it's over, His story's just begun
He is the Hunter of the lost, the ones who hide in shame
He seeks out every wounded life. He knows each one by name.
He is my great Physician, with a gifted Surgeon's hand
Composer of a masterpiece and Leader of the band.
He's everything that's gallant. His presence makes me free
The Artisan of glory, His love my mystery.



Prayer of a Messy Follower

Thank You Jesus...

You've been so faithful to this messed-up follower.

You restore my sanity on a weekly basis.

You reach into the nothingness and give me everything I need.

You've been far greater and more powerful than everything I've faced.

If I did anything good, it was because of You.

You have never given up on me even though I've given you plenty of opportunities.

I can't begin to know the number of times you have overlooked my weaknesses.

I can't think of a time when You haven't been there for me.

I wish I had the words to express how You bring me such peace.

I can only say, You have been so good to me.

I love you, Jesus.

If I didn't take another breath, every step I've walked with You has been worth it.

I love the promise of Heaven, but if this life was all there was, I wouldn't change a thing.

You deserve so much more of me, Jesus.

So tomorrow I'm going to try to hand more of my life over to You.

I just know I've got more to give and I can learn how to love You better than I did today.

So I'll see You in the morning.

Declarations for Every Day

- **Today– I'll live a life of celebration.** The brooding life is not holy. To many, it might look holy but a grave-digger and skeptic do not a Kingdom make.
- **Today– I'll simplify to remove distractions.** Our inability to hear God is directly linked to the static of modern life. It's perhaps the greatest plague of the church. We are uncomfortable with silence. The things we place before our eyes, the multitude of messages we receive on a daily basis, even the food that we eat potentially blocks our reception of God's voice. We often expel the voice of God through texts, emails, Facebook, radio, TV, and music.
- **Today– I'll meditate on Holy Scripture.** Don't just read it. Become preoccupied with it! Stuff your self full of holy words and you'll see it bring a blessing of peace over your life because your eyes and ears are open to His Word.
- **Today I'll follow God's heart and not my own.** Keep in mind what God thinks of your heart: It is deceitful. Culture says, "Follow your heart." Please don't. It's a dead-end proposition. Discover the heart of God and follow His. Stop all self-promotion campaigns. We all involved in a throne battle. Ask yourself: "Who will I place on the throne of my life? To which king will I bow down?"
- **Today I'll clarify boundaries in my personal world.** The ability to hear God is directly related to our ability to say **no** to lots of things in your life- even a few good things. We understand that we are not capable of doing everything for everybody. Your closest friends will not understand it. Some will be disappointed in you and others will think you are a prude, but celebrate your boundaries. If you understand the purpose you have

been created to achieve, saying **NO** (sometimes in bold and all caps) is not just recommended, it is required.

- **Today I'll seek discernment regarding my day.** Every morning, ask for wisdom and courage. You need them both in order to discern the voice of Holy God and to do whatever He tells you to do.
- **Today I won't tolerate negativity.** If you find yourself surrounded by negative, whiney, sarcastic people, consider the architecture of your life and think about doing a little renovation.
- **Today I'll have faith in the process.** St. John of the Cross, an early church father coined the term: the dark midnight of the soul. *"The journey in Faith—the midnight of the soul when the light has all faded away and darkness has completely descended."* He concludes that many Christ followers don't wish to endure the power of pain and tragedy that is necessary to pass through before the light shines again. An overriding theme of the Bible is that suffering is not simply to be experienced but celebrated. It produces a deeper intimacy with God.

No matter what the day brings, if I rest in these declarations, I will be safely set.

What Kind of Church is It?

We often categorize our churches with fancy titles: Relevant, emergent, classic, reformed, fundamentalist, traditional, contemporary, liturgical, purpose-driven etc... The list is really endless and the subtleties of each model vary. But what kind of church are we? Really...

- Some churches are more like a country club, complete

with secret handshakes, special membership privileges, and perks for members based upon your seniority and attitude. ***But we are not called to be a Country Club.***

- Some churches are more like a fashion show where once a week we are concerned more about what the members look like on the outside than who we are on the inside. ***But we are not called to be a fashion show.***
- Some churches are like a spa where healthy people come to be pampered with a painless personality makeover and self-help rallies devoid of the power of God. They'd never think about service or sacrifice because the church is meant only for enrichment—not spiritual warfare. ***But we are not called to be a spa.***
- Other churches are like courtrooms full of authority and judgment. Stern faces and hushed whispers are prevalent. Some believe that these churches are holy because of the formal atmosphere and the lack of tolerance for things like laughter, celebration and dancing. These churches are dead they just haven't gotten the good grace to lie down. ***But we are not called to be a court.***
- And on the opposite side, we find the church of cool, where musicians display their gifts not to the glory of God but rather to the glory of themselves. The tendency toward outlandishness knows no bounds. They are different just for the sake of being different. Messages aren't centered on the God or the Bible. In fact, some sermons might cause you to wonder if there is really is a point beyond the emotions and the glitz of atmosphere. What is the vibe? This is the main question in the church of the cool. ***But we are not called to be cool.***
- Each model apart from the work of Christ is like a cemetery. You can put flowers on the graves, you can have tea parties next to the tombs, you can pipe in the best music and serve the best meals but without Christ, the cemetery is still full of rot. ***But we are not called into death.***

So what about us? Are we any of these churches? For most churches, we've been all of these from time to time. That's why it is so important for us to be desperate and dependent upon God. Do we want to see people who are hurting and in need come to us for help or are we satisfied with self-serving religious organizations that offer risk-free comfort and predictability. We were made for much great things; things that accompany wonder, miracles, new life and transformation. How far are we willing to go? Who do we chose to exclude? Jesus is still knocking at the doors of churches promising that if anyone hears His voice and opens the door, He will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Let's invite people to the table through worship and become the kind of Church He desires to enter.

**Free use for sermon, bulletins, or websites.

Five Survival Sayings (Read, Believe, Repeat... Constantly)

Theological elitists, keep moving along. There's nothing that will interest you here.

Jacked-up sinners, like me, pay careful attention.

We all need a few easy-to-remember axioms that get us through the day. As a man of habit who has struggled with self-condemnation through the years, I've white-knuckled these truths in the middle of my own messiness. You may have heard them before but they are worth reviewing:

*The depth of God's love for me has **nothing** to do with my performance.*

It has *never* been about earning His love. There's *nothing* I could do that will make God love me more than He already does.

(nothing) God is love, love, love all the time, regardless of my behavior.

Jesus came for messy people (like me).

He walked into my personal hurt locker. The last few days of Jesus earthly ministry are a statement: "I can be hurt just like you." He didn't run away from the pain. He walked into it with purpose. He didn't create the struggle bus. He doesn't drive the struggle bus. He's on the struggle bus and He's sitting right there with you. If you grieve because you don't have it all together, remember this: Everybody— even (insert name of the holiest person you know) struggles.

The Gospel means Good News.

Jesus came to save, not to condemn. If you are feeling the weight of overwhelming condemnation, know that this is not from Jesus. Jesus was never into condemnation, except when it came to name-calling, angry, judgmental professional religionists.

I can never out-grace God.

He doesn't create torture. That is not in His nature. The stubborn nature of humanity is to figure out how to justify one's self in two ways: revealing our righteousness or someone else's unrighteousness. *This is not what Christianity is all about.*

We pay good money and attention to radio hosts, bloggers, TV pundits, and investigative reporters to root out the scandals around us. Something inside us draws us in to listen and to analyze it with friends. Perhaps we do this so that we can hear that whispering voice within us saying, "I'm better than

that guy. Right God?" While the truth is this: Uh... no. Jesus loves the ones caught in the act of adultery, idolatry, and addiction. It is the beautiful scandalous truth of Jesus' nature.

Love is the theme.

Ultimately, it all deconstructs into one simple gigantic word: love. It's not about how much money I give, how many good deeds I perform, how many verses I know, how many awards I garner. Love is the ultimate tester. It is about love and it always *will* be about love.

Important:

If the church you go to doesn't sound like this, you might want to reconsider what keeps you there. Because the message of Christianity is so often hijacked by legalism, perfectionism, authoritarianism, politics, elitism, showmanship, personality worship, serial guilt-mongering, racism, behavior-modification idolatry, brow-beating, shame-casting, theological hairsplitting, apoplectic apologetics, righteous sarcasm, appearance management, and a thousand other slings and arrows disguising themselves as orthodoxy.

Orthodox Christianity says, "Come, weary one. Find rest." If

you've been wounded by the church and find yourself disconnected, I want to challenge you to find a community of grace. Reengage with the truth of Jesus. You need it like I need it. Because when it comes right down to it, without that kind of love, grace and connection the world is a dark and lonely place.

Absalom (Contemporary Adaptation)

Actor mimes holding a baby in his arms, beaming with pride. He speaks to the audience.

This has to be the greatest moment of my life! And I got it all on videotape. The whole process was such a miracle. Michelle did great. *(to God)* Lord, how can I ever thank You for this child I'm holding? I give him over to You. I promise I'm going to give 100 percent to the task of parenting. You can count on me. I never dreamed being a dad would be so satisfying. I feel complete. I promise I'll be twice the dad my father was to me. *(to himself)* He needs a strong biblical name: I think we'll call him Absalom.

Actor turns his back momentarily, then begins to speak to his son (not seen by audience) in an angry tone.

Absalom! How dare you defy me! You are going to be in hot water when we get home. No laughing or running in church! You are embarrassing the whole family! Can't you see that? You aren't a baby anymore! You are five years old! *(Suddenly turn his focus toward the unseen pastor. He suddenly transforms from anger to all smiles.)* Oh, hi Pastor Ted. Just talking to my boy. Yes, he sure is growing. We all enjoyed your message

today.

Actor turns around again and has a seat in a chair. He pantomimes holding a phone to his ear.

I know it's the third night in a row, but this is what they pay me to do, Honey. I'm a manager now, and I think I have a good chance of becoming a vice president. *(Listens)* Well, you certainly enjoy the extra money, don't you. *(Listens)* That's not fair! Everything I do is for you and Absalom. I'll be home in an hour. Michelle? Michelle? *(He hangs up the phone and turns around.)*

When actor turns back around, he is pantomiming a repair.

Absalom, hand me that Phillips. Not the flathead, the Phillips screwdriver, son! How was youth camp? *(half listening, but focused mainly on the repair)* What's that? *(listening)* You want me to teach you what? To pray? I thought that's why our church hired a youth minister.

Actor turns, then faces the audience, stooped and older.

Lord, I know I promised I would give You my son. I meant to do that. I meant to take the time out of my schedule to really teach him. I guess I was so wrapped up in trying to make a living that I forgot. I thought if I gave him a lot of material things, you'd handle the spiritual. I was wrong. He's on the west coast now. I haven't seen him in two years. But, what hurts even more is that, even though he is distant from me, he's even more distant from You. "'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you.'" *(whispered)* "'Absalom, my son, my son!'"

Scripture: [2 Samuel 18:33](#)