



Words

TO LIVE BY

Present

OCTOBER 2021

PRESENT (OCTOBER)

Definition: *the period of time now occurring.*

August 26, 2021 my family packed up our belongings and drove nine hours back home to West Virginia to continue the unfinished work God was calling us to. Our last day of ministry in Michigan was August 1. We were planning to pack up that week and be ready to head out the next week, but God had other plans.

Buying and selling a home takes time. But I also quickly realized during those 26 days that God was going to force my family and I to rest and learn what it truly means to live in the present.

My husband, Jonathan, and I both have go-getter personalities. We were ready to move from one thing to the next until it was obvious that things were going to take time.

What were we going to do with that extra time? We could waste it and be lazy or we could be intentional with it and learn what it means for us to live in the present moment of each day.

The middle of August we decided to take a family trip up to Jonathan's parents cottage in the UP of Michigan for the weekend.

Previous to that trip I thought because I had all this extra time on my hands it would be a great time to continue writing more devotionals for this year. The next word that was waiting to be written on was, present. There were multiple times I tried to write and nothing would come. It was like the Holy Spirit was telling me, *not yet*.

Driving back from a restful weekend away I was telling Jonathan how I was frustrated because I had all this extra time but I wasn't able to write because nothing would come when I would try.

All of the sudden it was like the lightbulb went on in my head and I started to cry. I realized I had no business writing about something that I hadn't learned yet or even put into practice in my own life.

God used those 26 days to intentionally teach me how to live in the present with Him. I read books, listened to messages and soaked in the quiet (and loud) moments of each day with my family.

Looking back I realized how important those days were in preparing us for this next phase of ministry. Too often I'm guilty of pushing thru my days, weeks and months barely surviving and then I wonder why I'm exhausted and almost burned out.

That kind of living is not what God has called us to in Christ Jesus. If you look at Jesus earthly ministry He was never in a hurry. He took His time wherever He was and lived in the present. Jesus experienced peoples pain, joy and sadness with them.

Just the other day as I was pondering those thoughts in regards to scripture I remembered how Jesus taught His followers to pray in Matthew 6:9-13,

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us TODAY our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

I put in all caps the word that jumped out at me, *today*. Jesus didn't ask for needs to be met for tomorrow, only for today. He lived in the present.

That's not to say that you shouldn't make plans for the future, but when you do make sure you hold those plans loosely, with open hands, realizing they could change. Be careful not to worry about the future when Jesus wants you to live for today.

I encourage you this month to focus on the present. When you focus on what God could do in the future, you can easily miss what He is doing in the present.

Missionary Jim Elliot once said, *"Wherever you are be all there."*

WEEK 1: THE CURE FOR ANXIETY

Anxiety is a real problem in this world. There are so many things to worry about. Often you worry about things you can't even control. Even when you do have control, you can still have anxiety. It is hard to live in the present when anxiety is controlling you.

Often your greatest anxiety has to do with people. What will they think of me? How would they respond? Am I doing a good job raising my children? Does my boss appreciate all my hard work? Does my spouse really love me? Will my children be ok?

I have struggled with all of these thoughts at one time or another. How do you overcome this problem? I believe many followers of Jesus already know the answer but maybe it seems too easy so you overlook the answer that is right in front of you.

Anxiety was a problem back in Jesus' day too. He had some things to say about it that I hope and pray will sink deeply within you. Apply His answer to your problem with anxiety. Check it out from Matthew 6:25-34,

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:25-34

To give a little context, this is the same chapter that the Lord's prayer comes from earlier. Jesus had been teaching what it means to give to the poor, practice fasting and learn where your true treasure lies. (If you have time today, read the whole chapter of Matthew 6.)

Jesus starts out this next portion talking of anxiety with a command, *do not worry*. Have you ever noticed that before? You are commanded not to worry about your life. Jesus gives you an example of the birds and the flowers showing you how He cares for them. He reminds you that YOU are more valuable than birds and flowers. He will care for you just as He does them.

Jesus asks 5 specific questions in these verses. Take a moment and think about how you would answer each of them.

- *Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?*
- *Are you not much more valuable than they (the birds)?*
- *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*
- *And why do you worry about clothes?*
- *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith?*

Jesus tells you that when you worry you are like the pagans who chase after all these earthly things. He already knows everything that you need. There is a difference between your wants and your needs. Too often I am guilty of *wanting* things that I don't actually *need*. Jesus says the Father knows all your *needs*.

When you seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, all your needs will be met and given to you.

Jesus closes out the chapter by saying, *therefore*, which means, in light of everything He just said, *do not worry*. There's the command again. He opens and closes this section with the same command.

The reason you should not worry about tomorrow is because tomorrow will worry about itself. Every day has enough trouble of its own. Don't add more trouble to your day by worrying about things you can't control.

When you try to control everything in your life you put yourself in the place of God. You aren't strong or capable enough to have that position. God is the only one who is powerful and able to be in total control. Step back and let Him have that rightful place in your life.

I challenge you to fully surrender every area of your life to Jesus starting with that place of control. This is another area of sin that easily creeps in. You want to be in charge of your own life but you're actually not capable of doing it all on your own. Remember, Eve tried to put herself in the place of God because she wanted to be in charge and that is when sin came into the world.

Freedom from anxiety comes from surrendering to God what you can't control. Come to a place of confession and repentance recognizing your need for Jesus and His strength. When you allow God that rightful place, then you will be able to fully live in the present moment of today.

Why is it so important for a follower of Jesus to live in the present? Because living in the present;

- fuels your **passion**

- gives you **purpose**
- brings you **peace** (Prince of peace because He lived in the present)
- brings **perspective**
- teaches you to **persevere**
- leads you to **praise**
- provides time for **prayer**
- brings **patience**

To end each week of devotionals this month I want to share how each of my children help me to live in the present.

My third child, Addie Grace, has taught me to live in the present when she grabs my hand and drags me outside in the evening to look at the beautiful sunsets that God paints in the sky. I choose to live in the present with my Addie when we gaze at God's beauty together.

In those simple moments, all anxiety is stripped away as I pause and reflect on the goodness and faithfulness of who our God is.

Don't let anxiety prevent you from living in the present. Tomorrow will worry about itself.

WEEK 2: THE INVITATION

We all like getting an invitation in the mail. Being invited means that someone values you, appreciates you and loves you.

One of the best invitations I have ever received was to take a class this last spring with a small group of women who I'd never met that were currently working with church plants around the US. This class was to learn how God had uniquely created me to best serve His Church and to live within my passion and purpose. I excitedly signed up expecting there to be many homework assignments.

What I learned from that class was not exactly what I expected. While there were some assignments, the majority of the class was used to encourage us to make time to get alone with Jesus and just be present in the moment with Him.

The very first assignment was to go to a quiet place and listen to a recorded devotional on "Living As The Beloved." When you live in the moment with Jesus, He will speak His truth to you. If you want to grow in your relationship with Jesus, you need to meet Him in His word.

Did you know Jesus extends an invitation to you? In Matthew 11:28-30 NIV Jesus said, *"COME to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you REST. TAKE my yoke upon you and LEARN from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

I want to break down these three verses using four words that I put into an equation; *come + rest + take + learn = present.*

I am proposing that this is the solution Jesus gives for living in the present.

COME to Jesus, rest and live in the present with Him. Think about it, the God of the universe extends this invitation to you.

Are you weary? Are you burdened? Come to Jesus.

I have said this before in my writing that coming is an action word and requires movement on your end. God showed you how to act on this word by sending His only Son, Jesus who came down here to this earth to live and die to pay the punishment that your sin deserves.

Here are a few verses that show how Jesus came to you first.

Romans 5:8 NLT, *"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."*

1 John 4:9-10 NLT, *"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."*

Are you willing and ready to come to Jesus? He is waiting to give you rest.

REST is something this world has a hard time living out. You are encouraged to constantly live on the go, but that is the opposite of what Jesus calls you to. Jesus wants you to experience true rest in Him and that starts first by surrendering your life completely to Him.

Recognize and acknowledge that you won't have rest until you deal with your problem of sin. Because God is holy He cannot have sin in His presence. This is why confession and repentance as a daily practice is such a beautiful thing. It brings freedom and the rest you long for.

Jesus is the only One who can bear the weight of your sin and that is what He did on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 NIV says, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."*

Isaiah 53:4-5 NIV also reads, *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."*

Written at the fall of the Roman Empire, the bishop of Hippo said, *"You (God) have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."*

TAKE Jesus yoke upon you. In Bible times there were many different kinds of yokes that people referred to. There was the yoke of the kingdom, the yoke of the law, the yoke of repentance, the yoke of faith, etc. Jesus was simply telling you to take *His* yoke upon you. Don't worry about all the other yokes out there, come and take His yoke.

Pastor David Guzik in the Enduring Word Commentary said,

- " - The yoke of Jesus is easy and light as compared with the yoke of others.*
- The yoke of Jesus is easy and light as long as we do not rebel against it.*
- The yoke of Jesus has nothing to do with worries that are forbidden to us.*
- The yoke of Jesus does not include the burdens we choose to add to it."*

Jesus is offering you His own yoke. All you need to do is take it. Do you want to be guided by the yoke of Jesus? Remember, His yoke is easy and light because He bears it with you. You don't have to do it all alone. Jesus wants to come alongside you.

LEARN from Jesus. A disciple is a student to a teacher. They learn from and follow what their teacher says and does.

The Gospel of John recorded the time when Jesus washed his disciples feet shortly before His betrayal. Read what Jesus said to them in John 13:13-15 NLT, *"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."*

If you call yourself a disciple or follower of Jesus, are you making time to sit in the present with Him and learn from Him? As a disciple you are called to live your life as Jesus did.

1 John 2:6 NLT says, *"Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did."*

Jesus words from Matthew 11 were an invitation to come and live in the present with Him. When you accept the invitation you experience rest, an easy yoke and learn how He wants you to live.

One evening shortly after moving into our new home, my oldest daughter Zoe came to me and asked, *"Mom, would you like to come and sit outside on the front porch with me?"* This was an invitation from my daughter to live in the present with her. I needed once again to practice being present.

I love my Zoe girl and I love front porches so of course my answer was, yes. But even more so, in that moment, I loved that Zoe invited me to live in the present. She wanted that one on one time with me as her Mom. It made me think, *how much more does my heavenly Father want that one on one time with me?*

When is the last time you sat in the present with Jesus?

His invitation still stands...how will you respond?

Listen: Check out the song, *"Come To Jesus"* by Life.Church on YouTube.

WEEK 3: JUST BE

I remember in college sitting in chorale practice and listening to a fellow member share a devotional story about how her Mom would use the phrase *"let's just be today."* She talked about growing up and hearing her Mom say those words often to encourage their family to stop the crazy, busyness of life and just live in the present together. I have never forgotten those words, *let's just be*, and have used them in my own family when I need to be reminded to stop and live in the present.

There was a woman in scripture who knew exactly what it looked like to live in the present and she didn't apologize for it either. You find her story in Luke 10.

"Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who was also seated at the Lord's feet, and was listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do the serving by myself? Then tell her to help me.'

But the Lord answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; but only one thing is necessary; for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'" Luke 10:38-42 NIV

This story is another one in scripture that I have always loved. I find myself going back and reading it every so often. I like to sit in the text by putting myself in the story. Who would I have been? Who would you have been? Mary or Martha? There is so much to meditate on.

If you go back towards the beginning of Luke 10, you will read in verse 17 that Jesus had around 70 people following Him. When you get to verse 38 it says, *Now as **they** were traveling along*. Some scholars believe that there could have been close to 70+ people at Mary and Martha's home that day.

Compare and contrast with me who Martha and Mary were in this story.

Martha often gets a bad rap in this story but there are some good things that you can learn from her. Martha loved having people come to her home. Verse 38 says, *Martha welcomed Him into her home*.

Martha definitely had the gift of hospitality. She used her home to serve others. Martha wanted to make sure that everyone had what they needed so they could listen well to Jesus. But, she didn't like the fact that her sister Mary was not helping her. You find Mary sitting at Jesus feet and listening to Him. Mary was, *living in the present* with Jesus.

Scripture says, *Martha was distracted with all her preparations*. The word distracted in the Greek means to, *draw away*. Martha was allowing all of her preparations and work of serving to draw her away from Jesus. She ends up interrupting Jesus by sharing her frustration regarding her sister Mary.

Jesus response to Martha is powerful and thought provoking for me. Jesus confronts Martha about her worried and anxious heart. More often than not, people who are busy serving are always thinking ahead at what needs to be done next. This is not living in the present.

John Mark Comer in his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* wrote, *"The present is the point at which time touches eternity."*

C.S. Lewis said, *"There is no other day. All days are present now. This moment contains all moments."*

In His kindness Jesus told Martha, *only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her*. Jesus used His words to draw Martha back to Himself.

Do you see the contrast between the two? The distraction of her preparations was drawing Martha away from Jesus and He drew her back to Himself by His response.

When I read of Mary I am encouraged seeing her boldness to sit at Jesus feet and learn from Him. It was not looked highly upon for women to learn in that culture, yet Mary had the courage (trusting God when God is entrusting you) to live in the present with Jesus.

Mary knew that *being* with Jesus is what would make her holy. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" Being in the presence of God's holiness reveals your sinfulness.*

The gospel is simply recognizing God's holiness. There is no good in and of yourself that will ever get you to heaven. That is why God sent His Son Jesus, who lived a holy and sinless life on this earth to die on the cross to pay the punishment that you deserve.

Romans 10:9 says, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Friend, you can't live a holy life if you don't spend time with Jesus. I encourage you to sit with others who are sitting at the feet of Jesus. Learn from fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are following Jesus too.

Even the apostle Paul sat at the feet of others and learned from them. In Acts 22:3 Paul said, *"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel,*

taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today." Acts 22:3 NKJV

Each time I read the story of Mary and Martha I realize that I'm more guilty of being like Martha. But I want to be a Mary. I want to choose the better. I want to sit in the present with Jesus and learn from Him. Do you?

C.S. Lewis said *"And how could we endure to live and let time pass if we were always crying for one day or one year to come back — if we did not know that every day in a life fills the whole life with expectation and memory and that these are that day?"*

Don't live your life wishing you could go back and relive a certain moment, choose to live in the present today.

My son Jesse helps me to live in the present when he asks me to come outside and watch him ride his dirt bike or at night before bed when he just wants to talk about life. So, I remind myself to stop what I'm doing and *just be* with my only son. He helps me realize I will never get those moments back.

Remember, memories are made up of moments.

When is the last time you sat yourself in the present at the feet of Jesus?

- 1 Chronicles 16:11 ESV reads, *"Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!"*

- Psalm 16:11 ESV reads, *"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."*

Listen: Check out the song, *"Just Be"* by Kim Walker Smith on YouTube.

WEEK 4: ZACCHAEUS

Have you ever thought about someone who really needed to be introduced to Jesus, but thought it was probably a lost cause? Maybe you thought they were too far gone? How would they every leave their sinful ways of; alcoholism, drug addiction, sleeping around, cheating people out of money, murdering innocent lives, and the list goes on.

If I am being honest, I have had those thoughts myself and am not proud of them. Those are self-righteous thoughts. When I let those thoughts come into my mind I doubt the power of God and His ability to transform even the worst of sinners.

I also deny myself the opportunity to reach out, live in the present with them and introduce them to their Savior. That makes me feel sick inside. Then I ask myself the question, *who am I that Jesus should love and die for me? I am no better than them.*

Today I want to study with you the story of a man that some of you will remember from your Sunday school years, Zacchaeus. If you knew about Zacchaeus from an early age I'm sure you are singing the song, *Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man*, in your head right now. I am.

You find his story in Luke 19:1-10 NIV,

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'"

Zacchaeus lived in the same city of Jericho that Joshua from the Old Testament walked around with the Israelites to destroy. This was known as an important city and one that on this specific day Jesus had to pass thru because He had a divine appointment with this tax collector.

Not only was Zacchaeus a tax collector but he was the *chief* tax collector. Tax collectors were hated by the Jews because they would charge them much more on their taxes and would pocket the extra for themselves, making them very wealthy.

Zacchaeus had obviously heard about this man named, Jesus and was determined to see Him in person. There was only one problem...he was too short to see above the crowd of people when Jesus was passing thru.

There is a sense of urgency that Zacchaeus displayed. He was on a mission to see Jesus. Jesus wanted much more for Zacchaeus than simply *seeing* who He was. Jesus wanted to meet Zacchaeus face to face and start a relationship with him.

The quickest way for Zacchaeus to fix his problem of being too short to see Jesus was to climb up a sycamore tree. It was there when Zacchaeus was up in the tree that Jesus stopped beneath and then looked up at him. Jesus starts the conversation using his name.

The name Zacchaeus means, *pure one*. Zacchaeus definitely did not live up to his name. He was anything but pure to the people around him. He was known as a thief who cheated them out of money.

Jesus knew that today Zacchaeus would become one of His followers and He called him to Himself. In John 10:2-3 NIV Jesus said, *"The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep **by name** and leads them out."*

In that passage Jesus was saying He is the Shepherd and He knows each of His sheep (his followers) by name. He knows your name too.

Jesus invites Himself over to Zacchaeus' house. He says to *come down, for **today** I must stay at your house*. Notice Jesus didn't say tomorrow, He said today. Jesus invited Zacchaeus to live in the present of today with him. Zacchaeus gladly accepted His invitation.

Your relationship with Jesus begins just like it did for Zacchaeus. Jesus extends the same invitation to you. He knows your name too. In John 1:12 Jesus said, *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

Have you received and accepted Jesus invitation for yourself? Do it today.

Luke 19:6 says that Zacchaeus *hurried down and received Him gladly*. Jesus took the time to stop, live in the present, meet Zacchaeus where he was at (up in a tree), start a conversation with him and continue it further in his home.

Many people, specifically the religious leaders, watched and witnessed this whole conversation with Zacchaeus and their response was one of disgust with Jesus. They started to grumble among themselves because Jesus chose to live and eat with tax collectors and sinners. They believed this was wrong.

The early church was hated because of their acceptance for the outcast, but they considered this as something beautiful and not shameful. They lived out what Jesus taught them.

Remember one of Jesus first disciples, Thomas, was also a tax collector. Jesus called Thomas to leave his sinful life behind and to follow Him. Thomas accepted that invitation.

Jesus never thought that Thomas or Zaachaeus were too far gone for His love and salvation.

Zaachaeus' response to everything that happened in those few hours with Jesus was one of total transformation. He did a 180 in his life and went from being a thief to giving half of his possessions to the poor and repaying the people he had cheated 4 times the amount he had stolen.

When Jesus transformed Zacchaeus life he became more like what his name means, *pure one*. Living in the present moments of that day with Jesus totally changed Zaachaeus' life.

Jesus affirmed Zaachaeus as one of His new followers when He said, *today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.*

Jesus closing statement to these religious people who were bystanders is one you and I need to be reminded of, *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was **lost***. Lost is the big word here. If you've already been found by Jesus, join Him in seeking those out in the world who are still lost. Specifically going back to the beginning that means seeking those who are living those sinful lifestyles.

Stop long enough to see lost people.

Jesus not only lived life with His followers, He also lived among the lost.

Are you guilty of spending so much time *inside* the church that you forget or even neglect those *outside* the church? It is easy to spend most of our time living among the body of Christ. Don't get me wrong, that is wonderful and you should be spending time with them but, too often we neglect to spend time with and live among the lost. Jesus did both and so should you.

Followers of Jesus are commanded to be on mission to, *seek and save the lost*, just like He was. He gave you a perfect example in Zaachaeus. Jesus chose to live in the present with Zaachaeus and because of that Zaachaeus' life was changed forever. I challenge you to practice living in the present with those around you.

John Mark Comer said, *"Slow down long enough to enjoy life with God, who offers everything that materialism promises but can never deliver on—namely, contentment."*

This is what Zaachaeus did. He enjoyed living in the present with Jesus and it gave him everything he was longing for.

When I think of my youngest daughter, Izzie, I am reminded to live in the present with her every time she drags her blanket across the floor and asks me to snuggle with her. I'm never guaranteed to get those moments back, so I gladly accept her invitations to stop and be with her.

As we end another month of Words To Live By, remember going forward to look to the past and to the future but firmly plant yourself in the present.