



Every Day Holy

Day 1: The Beginning

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!

2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSVUE

I've been a Christian since the beginning. There is no conversion story. No lovely come-to-Jesus moment. There is just me growing up, knowing the world is round and that God created it. I was often jealous of my parents. They had the story I desired. They had a clear and exciting beginning to their faith journey. Newly married in Indiana, both had been raised loosely in the church. Neither had any relationship with Jesus and then they suddenly found him separately, at the same time. One night they turned to each other and confessed that they had found Jesus. Growing up, this was the story I longed for. I wanted the big beginning. I wanted the drama. I wanted a before and after. But that's not my story.

I've always dreaded sharing my testimony. Because I've associated testimonies with before and after conversion stories, I've found myself asking: *Can you have a testimony when you've only ever known God?* I've grappled at finding my lightning bolt moment. My *beginning*, the story that changed everything. And I'm always left feeling like a fraud. A girl without a beginning.

Everything has a beginning. Everything starts somewhere. If I am unable to recognize the beginning, I diminish my capability to see where I am going. My beginning feels small. It is two parents that shared their love for a Savior with me so that I would know the same love. Perhaps the beginning of my faith story actually starts at the beginning of my parents' conversion. Maybe the story I have always yearned for is already mine.

Or maybe the beginning is Christ on the Cross. As 2 Corinthians reminds me, I am a new creation in him. Sometimes I don't realize something has started until I am well on my way. Often, I don't see a clear beginning until I look back.

Questions:

1. What are some beginnings that you didn't recognize initially?
2. What is your testimony?
3. When was the last time you shared it with someone?



Day 2: If I Could Do It All

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Matthew 6:33–34 NRSVUE

If I could do it all I'd be a perfect mother, wife and friend. If I could do it all my house would be clean and organized. My closet perfectly curated with just enough clothes for all the right occasions, I'd dress stylishly every day. I'd have children who ate their vegetables because they were cooked in the perfect recipe. I'd have time to read all the books and watch all the shows. I wouldn't be late or rushing to the next appointment on my schedule. My days would be perfectly timed and allotted. And the list goes on. The one thing not on that list? God. If I could have it all I would quickly forget my need for a Creator.

I can't do it all and yet I continue to try. Each morning I wake and start adding to the list of things to get done. And each evening I return to bed with items still left to be done. My temptation is to long for more hours in the day. More time to fulfill my need to be triumphant in the goal of doing it all. I am left feeling like less when I try to do more.

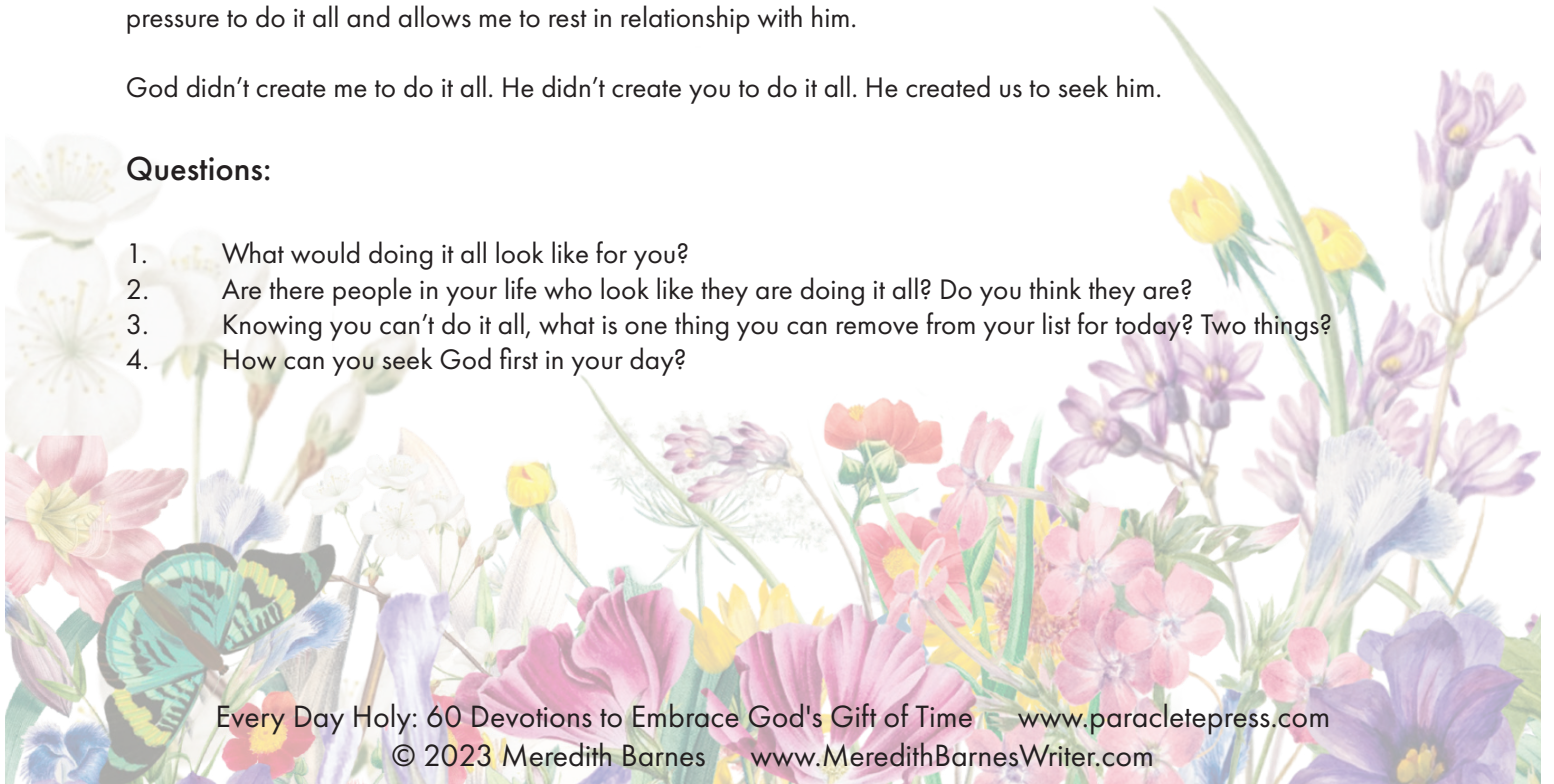
When I try to do it all I am in a constant pattern of looking to the next. The next chore, the next meeting, the next hour of the day. My time becomes something I worry about or move through anxiously. When I worry about doing it all I start to remove things from my day that are not deemed productive, the subtle moments when I often find the most joy.

Matthew 6 challenges my need to be self-reliant. It offers a new goal—seek God first. Rather than continue to try to work harder, faster, better, God is asking me to let go of trying to be him. My reliance on God releases me from the pressure to do it all and allows me to rest in relationship with him.

God didn't create me to do it all. He didn't create you to do it all. He created us to seek him.

Questions:

1. What would doing it all look like for you?
2. Are there people in your life who look like they are doing it all? Do you think they are?
3. Knowing you can't do it all, what is one thing you can remove from your list for today? Two things?
4. How can you seek God first in your day?





Day 3: Slow Down

He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Exodus 33:14 NRSVUE

I can't do a pushup. My wrists are arthritic (and have been since I was eight years old), which means that they don't bend to a 90-degree angle to allow proper pushup form. Truth be told, for much of my life I wasn't concerned about this limitation, in respect to doing a proper pushup. Later in life I had a fitness renaissance only to discover my body had limitations, pushups being one of them.

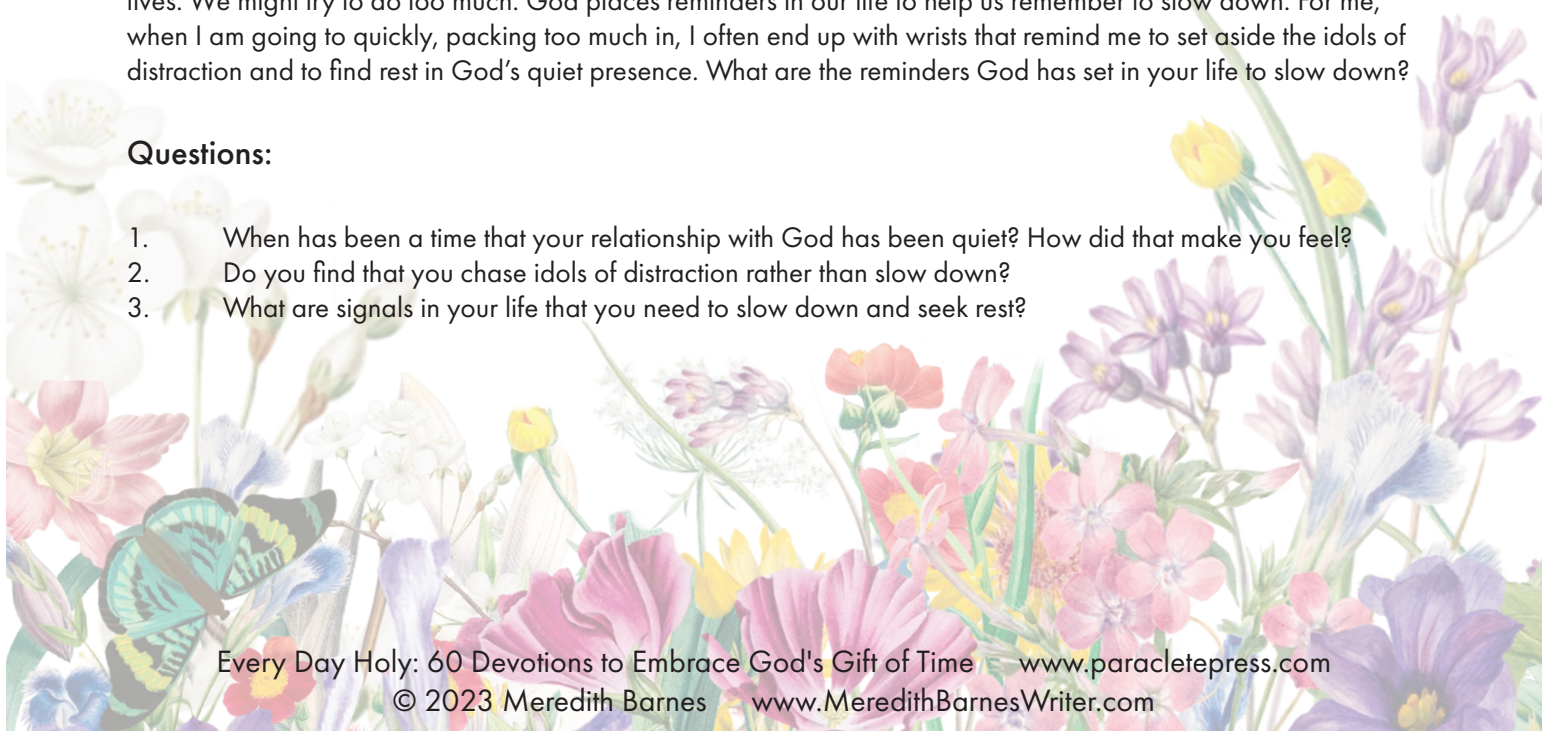
My wrists continue to be a source of frustration for me. They are sensitive and bother me if I do too much. The problem is, "too much" is not well defined. Sometimes "too much" is playing tennis for an hour, sometimes "too much" is attempting to do the pushups I so badly wish I could do, sometimes "too much" is picking up my child a few too many times in a day. I've lived with these wrists for over 30 years, you would think I would also have learned how to not do "too much." But I haven't.

I don't want to slow down. In Exodus 12 when God sends the Israelites into the desert, he goes with them. He provides them protection crossing the Red Sea. He drops bread from heaven when they have no food. He pours water from a rock when they thirst. God does not desert them. And then when they arrive in Sinai, Moses goes to speak with God, and the people decide to make an idol to worship. *Quick Moses is gone and we don't know what God is up to, let's find something else to worship.* God, understandably, is upset and wants to be done with the Israelites. In Exodus 33 we see Moses's plea that God not give up. And God's response is to give them rest.

When it comes to how we use and spend our time, it's hard for some of us to slow down. Our relationship with God can feel quiet sometimes. And when things get quiet, we can look to turn up the volume in other places in our lives. We might try to do too much. God places reminders in our life to help us remember to slow down. For me, when I am going to quickly, packing too much in, I often end up with wrists that remind me to set aside the idols of distraction and to find rest in God's quiet presence. What are the reminders God has set in your life to slow down?

Questions:

1. When has been a time that your relationship with God has been quiet? How did that make you feel?
2. Do you find that you chase idols of distraction rather than slow down?
3. What are signals in your life that you need to slow down and seek rest?





Day 4: Speed Up

But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 1: 17 NRSVUE

I broke up with my college boyfriend before a two-hour car ride that we had to drive together. It was not ideal. Three years later I broke up with my next boyfriend before a nine-hour card ride back to Chicago from his family's cabin in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. Once again, we were driving in the same car. Why didn't I learn my lesson the first time? Because I was resistant to listening to the voice of action in my head.

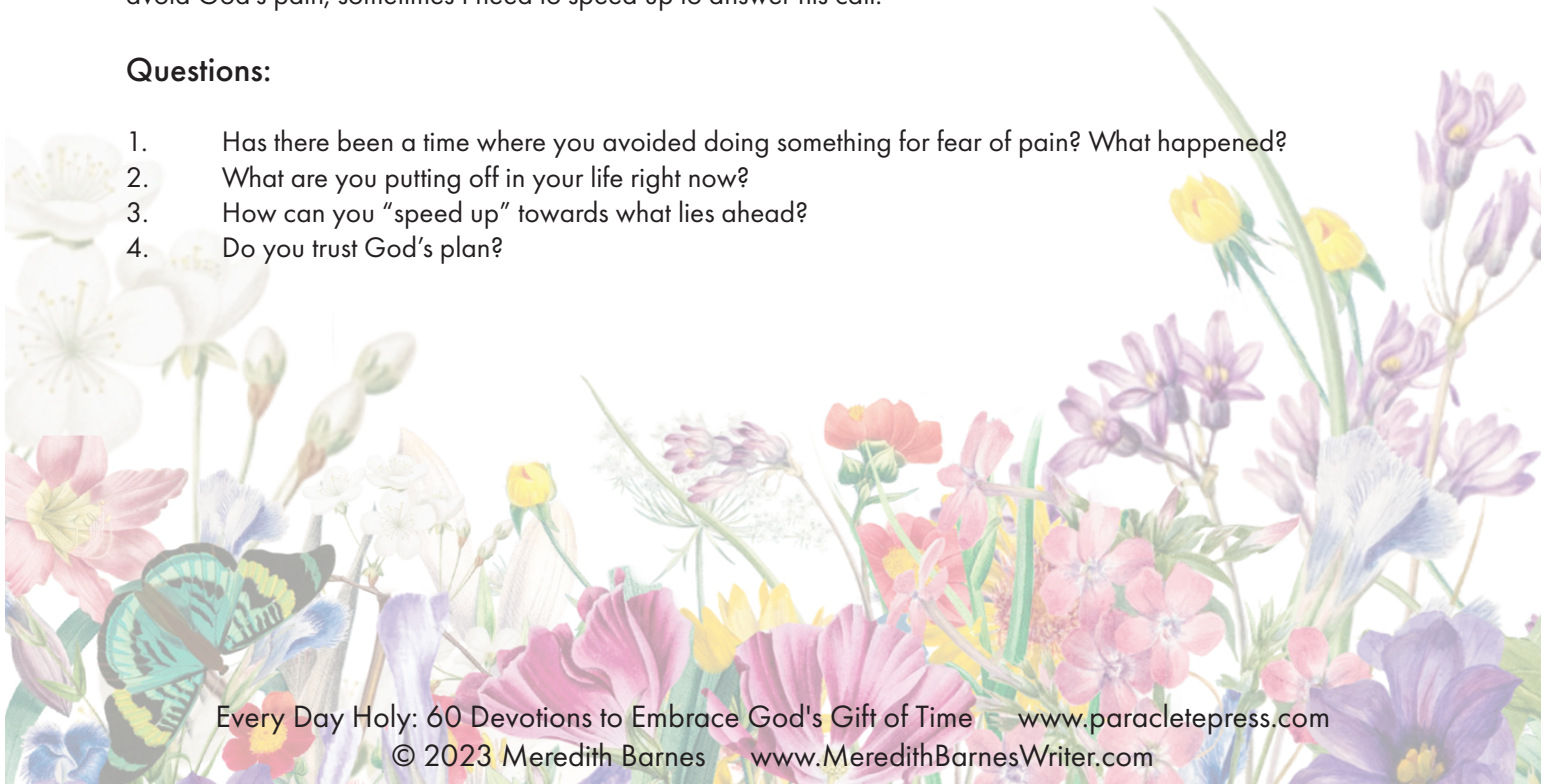
I knew weeks before these breakups that the relationships were over and yet I held onto them. I wanted to be in a relationship more than I wanted to be alone. I feared what would come after I had parted ways with these men. The fear of what I could not see ahead stopped me from acting on what I knew to be true—I was clinging to dead end relationships. I dragged my feet and avoided action because I did not want to feel pain.

In the book of Jonah, God asks Jonah to deliver a message, and Jonah refuses. Jonah flees God and his request. But, as we know, you can't truly flee God. Avoiding pain does not protect us from pain, it only delays the onset. Sometimes it even increases the pain we feel. Had Jonah obeyed God the first time, Jonah would have avoided being swallowed by a fish. He would have avoided suffering. Instead, Jonah chose to put off what he knew was right—a clear calling from God—and ended up wasting time as well as increasing his pain.

Those nine hours in a car next to a sudden ex-boyfriend taught me the pain that procrastination in my life can cause. Stubbornly avoiding what lies ahead only puts me further from God's desires for me. When I am tempted to avoid God's path, sometimes I need to speed up to answer his call.

Questions:

1. Has there been a time where you avoided doing something for fear of pain? What happened?
2. What are you putting off in your life right now?
3. How can you "speed up" towards what lies ahead?
4. Do you trust God's plan?





Day 5: Life Abundantly

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10 NRSVUE

When planning my wedding, I cried every time someone wanted to discuss the guest list. I don't like to be the center of attention. I wither under perceived expectations of those around me. The thought of a large group of people all coming to a location for me was overwhelming. And so, each time Ben and I would sit down to discuss how many people would be at our wedding, I would freeze like a deer in headlights. The anxiety was overwhelming. And so, I cried.

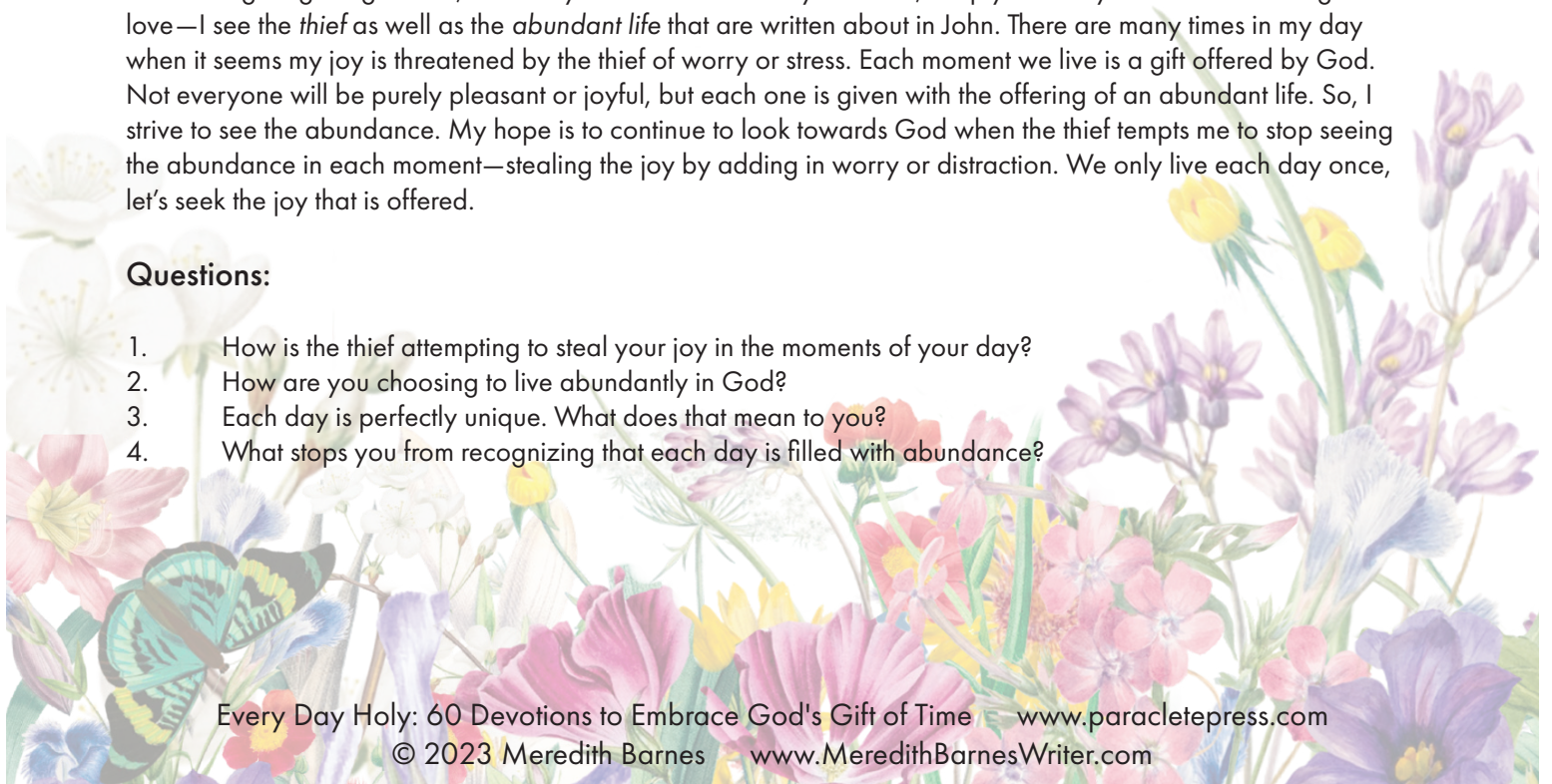
There were many beautiful parts to planning my wedding. Not someone who has dreamed about the details of my big day, there were many decisions that didn't consume my mind. They were easy enough to make without much worry. But each time we discussed the family and friends we were inviting I became overwhelmed. Our wedding day arrived and 106 people gathered at a local botanical garden to celebrate the life Ben and I were starting together. I walked down the aisle with my dad to "Amazing Grace" and laughed with Ben as he took a large chunk of bread for communion all the while the pastor telling Ben it was too big—it was.

I only plan to have one wedding. It's here and gone. The experience of that day is now held in photographs on our walls, a DVD we dust off every year on our anniversary and snapshots in my mind that appear as feelings rather than real memories once in a while.

What does it look like to live abundantly? As I look back at the planning of our wedding—the tears that I cried when navigating the guest list, the worry about all of those eyes on me, the joy of family and friends sharing in our love—I see the *thief* as well as the *abundant life* that are written about in John. There are many times in my day when it seems my joy is threatened by the thief of worry or stress. Each moment we live is a gift offered by God. Not everyone will be purely pleasant or joyful, but each one is given with the offering of an abundant life. So, I strive to see the abundance. My hope is to continue to look towards God when the thief tempts me to stop seeing the abundance in each moment—stealing the joy by adding in worry or distraction. We only live each day once, let's seek the joy that is offered.

Questions:

1. How is the thief attempting to steal your joy in the moments of your day?
2. How are you choosing to live abundantly in God?
3. Each day is perfectly unique. What does that mean to you?
4. What stops you from recognizing that each day is filled with abundance?





Day 6: Making Time

Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise.

Ephesians 5: 15 NRSVUE

When I decided to write a book, I knew it was going to take a lot of time. As a mom to three young boys, I wasn't sure how I was going to find the time. Not having enough time has been a willing and ready excuse throughout my life. I love to employ the vague *I'm busy* when plans are unappealing or stressful to me. Am I busy? Sometimes yes and sometimes no. What I found as I embarked on writing a book was that there was time for the work, when I made it.

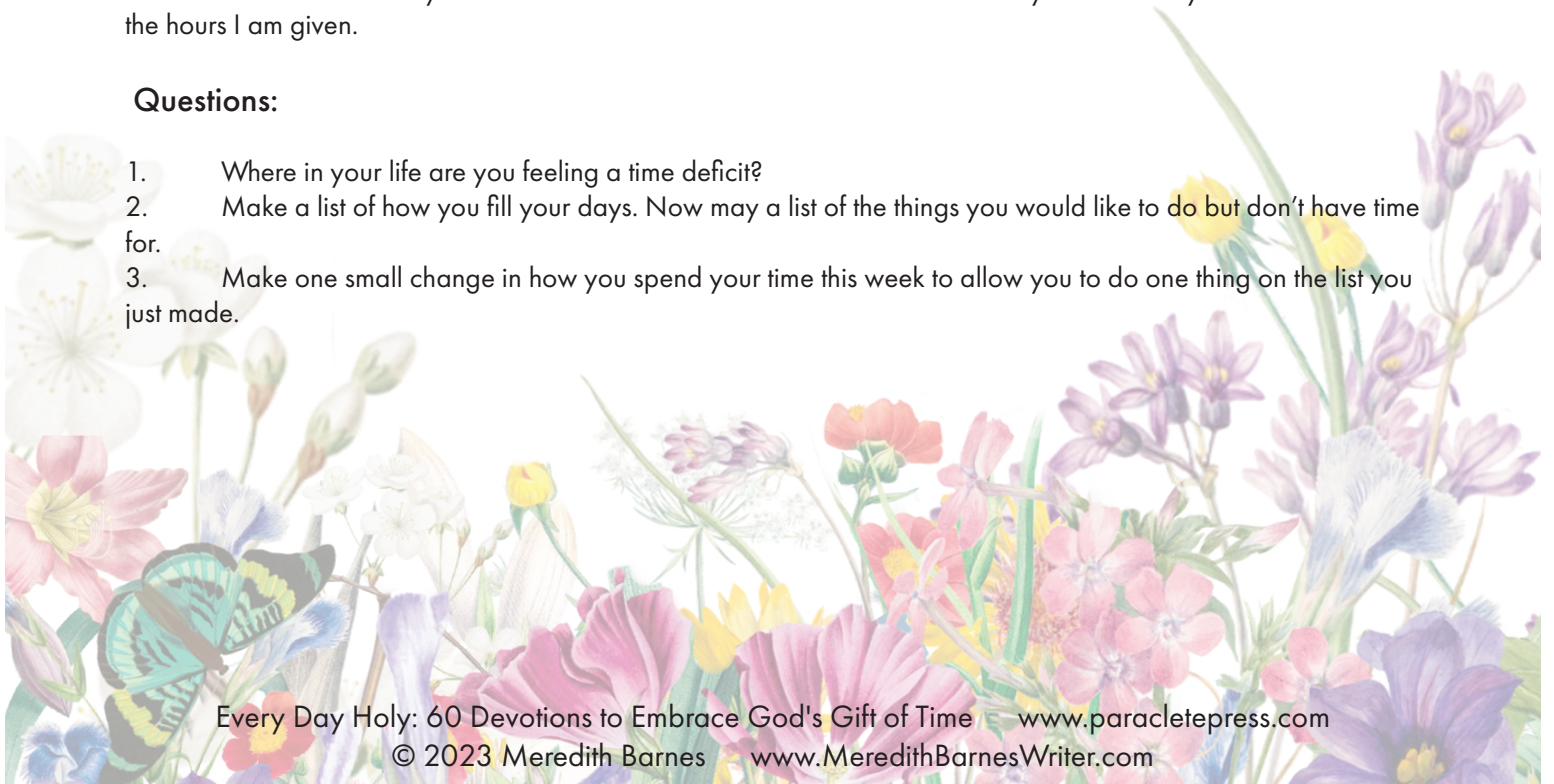
Finding time for what's important doesn't come without sacrifice. When I shifted around my schedule to find time to write it meant that most days, I would wake up an hour earlier than I was used to. It meant addressing my time in the mornings with intention and strategy. It meant discipline. I had to give things up to find time: TV, sleep, time with my children, time with friends, time for other hobbies I loved.

Ephesians 5 warns us to be wise with our time. It is easy to go from day to day without a clear plan of attack. Momentum from our lives can keep us just busy enough that we forget to look carefully at how we walk through our day—how we are spending our time. What we are making time for and what we are putting off with the excuse of being too busy. What don't you have time for? Your dream business? Working out? Reading the Bible? Meeting up with Friends?

I wish I could actually manufacture time. If only I could fabricate more time for each day. I can't of course, God created the hours in the day with as much intention as he created each hair on my head. It is my task to be wise with the hours I am given.

Questions:

1. Where in your life are you feeling a time deficit?
2. Make a list of how you fill your days. Now may a list of the things you would like to do but don't have time for.
3. Make one small change in how you spend your time this week to allow you to do one thing on the list you just made.





Day 7: When It's Hard to Enjoy Time

Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer.

Romans 12:12 NRSVUE

There is only so much we can do when it comes to time. We can be wiser with our time. We can be generous with our time. We can appreciate our time. We can always be working on viewing time as the gift that it is intended to be. But that doesn't mean we will always feel in control of our time or how we spend it. Frankly there will be many occasions throughout our lives when it doesn't feel like we are able to do what we want with our time.

Some of us are working over forty hours a week just to get by financially. We can't even imagine how time is a gift when it seems we are always having to put off doing the things we really want to do or love. We are stressed that we can't spend enough time with family or children or spouses. Some of us are stuck in dead end jobs and feel we are just watching the hours and minutes tick by each day waiting until we can go home. Some of us are at home with children and even though we thought this was what we wanted, it feels like something is missing and we yearn to do more with our days.

There are endless occasions in our lives in which time doesn't feel like a gift, so what should we do? Even when we might not have a choice in how we spend our time, we still have a choice in how we interact with the time we have. Make no mistake, this will not be easy. Watching others go on vacations you fear you will never experience. Taking care of everyone in the family and feeling like no one is caring for you. There are so many seasons when time does not feel fruitful or like a blessing. But the struggles in our lives don't mean that God is not sovereign and that the time he has created is spoiled.

Romans 12:12 lays out a simple truth to us about life. There will be moments when hope will feel easy to hold onto but there will also be many seasons of pain. We are called to be patient in these occurrences. Be faithful in your thoughts and actions in the season when time feels like a grind—simply getting from one obligation to the next. Invite God into your days through simple prayers, even when it feels like you don't have time to sit in his word, or go to the Bible study at church. He is still there beside you. He has not forgotten you. He is still offering you the gift of time.

Questions:

1. Describe how you feel about time right now. Do you feel you have control of how you spend your time? Explain.
2. What is one time in your day that you need to invite God into? How can you do this?
3. Who is someone in your life you can reach out to who might be struggling to have control of their time? (an overworked co-worker, a busy mom, the woman at church) How can you pray for this woman or offer physical help/support?



Day 8: When It's Not Your Time

See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:15-17 NRSVUE

Passed up for the promotion at work. Watching someone else succeed while you are still stuck in the grind. Seeing a friend blossom while you still feel awkward. Have you ever felt like everyone around you is exactly where they should be and you're just getting by? Most of us have felt overlooked, underserved, unseen. We know what it's like when it's just not our time to shine, and it doesn't feel good.

God doesn't promise us success throughout all of our life. If you read through the Bible, consistently the message is actually the opposite. God uses the fallen, broken, un-sparkly, underdogs to spread his message. But he doesn't use these people so that they can be seen as great, he uses these people to remind everyone that God is the one who is great.

You may be in a season of life when you feel like it's not your time to shine. If you are, I know there is likely pain that is attached to this. But there is hope. The hope is not in your future glory (even though there may be many earthly successes ahead for you). The hope is in God's glory. 1 Thessalonians reminds us that in all circumstances—in times of success, in times of feeling alone or forgotten—we are not alone. We are under the providence of God and his Holy Spirit.

What if we thought about the faithful servants God used throughout the Bible in season that we feel forgotten? What if we deliberately pointed our attention away from the feelings of bitterness or envy that might creep up as we watch others seemingly succeed and instead focused on giving thanks to God regardless of how shiny we feel? The Holy Spirit is always within us as believers. This presence offers us a shine that cannot be dulled or taken away. The next time you feel you are watching everyone else shine around you, remember that before God we all radiate in his glory.

Questions:

1. How do you feel when something ends unexpectedly?
2. Do you approach each moment with attention? Or do you rush to what's next?
3. Are you comfortable not knowing "the end" or do you try to see what's up ahead?



Day 9: Losing Track of Time

*You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Psalm 16:11 NRSVUE

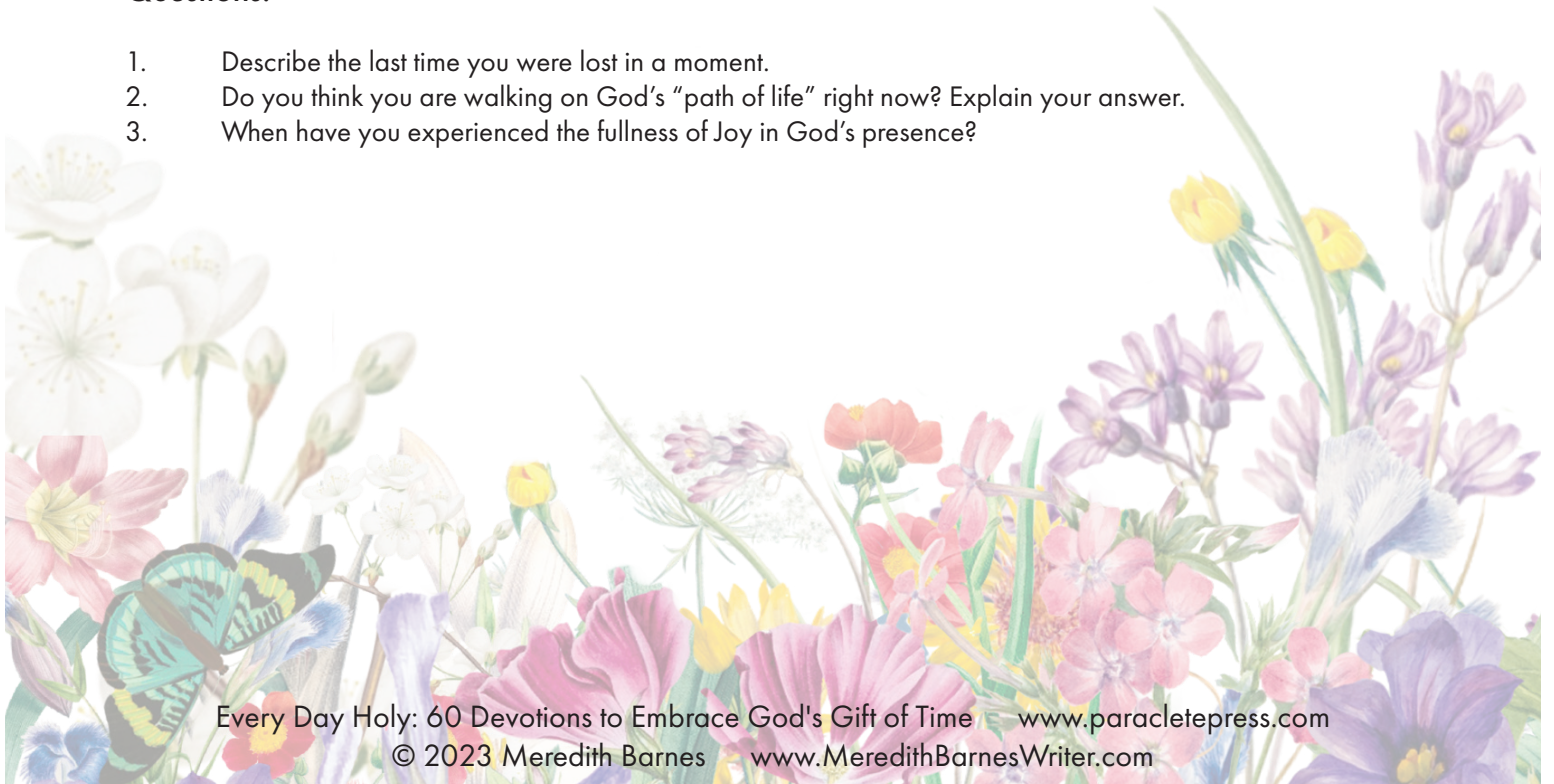
Have you ever been completely caught up in a moment? Maybe you were on a run or driving in your car and your favorite song came on. Suddenly you are singing along and completely unaware of time. Or perhaps you are at the beach with your friends or family and the day is so perfect—the sun’s warmth on your skin, the sky a perfect blue, the sand soft beneath your toes. Everything is just right and you completely lose track of time. Have you ever lost track of time because you were so utterly filled with contentment or joy?

I like to think of these moments as a taste of what’s to come. Psalm 16 walks us through God’s plan for each of us. First, we are gifted time here on earth. And with that time, we are invited to walk on God’s path. But the earthly path is not the only promise, we learn that at God’s right hand are “pleasures forevermore”: Heaven! I am the first to admit I have more questions than answers about heaven, but what I like to think about when I ponder heaven is losing track of time. The bliss of a moment that allows us to detach from our earthly constraints and transcends us to a heavenly moment of simply being present and wrapped up in joy. Doesn’t that sound lovely, to live in that joyful and contented moment eternally?

Make note of these moments in your life. The next time you are caught up in a moment, thank God not only for the present pleasure but also for the eternal promise that is waiting ahead.

Questions:

1. Describe the last time you were lost in a moment.
2. Do you think you are walking on God’s “path of life” right now? Explain your answer.
3. When have you experienced the fullness of Joy in God’s presence?





Day 10: The End

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,[a] but only the Father."

Matthew 24:36 NRSVUE

I'm not supposed to know the end of the story. It doesn't work that way. Ben travels for work. He often flies once or twice a month, leaving us for 4-5 days at a time. It has become part of our routine. We have become used to the schedule. It's easy to take the familiar for granted. Sometimes we stop paying attention once we get acclimated to a routine. We stop seeing our time as valuable and rather we just amble through our days without much intention.

At some point, I started to notice when Ben and I would talk on the phone during the weeks he was in Chicago he would always say "I love you" at the end of our calls. Every time we hung up the last words, he spoke to me were "I love you." If he had already said it and I mentioned one last thing, he would say it again before signing off. Two years into this travel routine Ben turned to me one night and asked if I knew why he said "I love you" every time he said goodbye to me. I shrugged not thinking too much about it. He explained that should anything happen to him while he was away, he wanted the last words he spoke to me to be words of love.

We don't know when the end is coming. Some of us would like to, some of us would prefer to stay oblivious. But no matter what we prefer, Jesus has made it clear in Matthew 24 that knowing the end is only under God's understanding. We don't know what comes next in the scope of our lives. We take much of our time for granted. We are impatient with our children. We can be selfish with our time. We long for tomorrow and wish away today. But it doesn't have to be that way. What if we started approaching each parcel of time without assumption of the next and simply enjoyed the now?

Questions:

1. How do you feel when something ends unexpectedly?
2. Do you approach each moment with attention? Or do you rush to what's next? How could you bring more intention to the current moment?
3. Are you comfortable not knowing "the end" or do you try to see what's up ahead? Why?

