

Present

“Few things are needed—or indeed only one” (Luke 10:42).

Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

Song: “Forever at Your Feet”

Waiting for the young woman to arrive at the restaurant, I took the few short minutes I had to myself to lean my head against the back of the booth. It had been an especially busy season of ministry, and I was grateful for a few moments of quiet. My thoughts turning to all that the day had already held, I realized that I had spent the day scheduling people like tasks to be completed on a to-do list.

Life had become a series of commitments to keep. People mattered, but I had lost the right reason. Relationships take time, but the motive behind the investment determines whether we enjoy those around us or see them as responsibilities to carry. For Martha, as we see in Luke 10, people had to be fed, tasks completed, and needs met; but Jesus commended Mary for her decision to sit with Him.

Motivation is key when it comes to our ability to be relationally present and attentive to those around us, especially in how we relate to the Lord and invest in time with Him. Martha’s heart was positioned toward the things that needed to be done (v. 40). Mary, however, had a heart to know Jesus, something that would happen only by spending time with Him.

Father, thank You for giving Jesus to help us know how to be present with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 January 25–31. **Regina Franklin** lives in Georgia, where she and her husband serve as church planters. She values building relationships with those around her and enjoys all things coffee.

Seeing in the Dark

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up” (John 11:11).

Scripture: John 11:1-11

Song: “Waiting Here for You”

I sat with my friend, feeling the ache behind her words. Having been married for fewer than five years, she had recently discovered her husband’s infidelity. He was done—not just with her but also with Jesus. She struggled for answers. She realized their romance had been a bit of a whirlwind, but also that she had entered the relationship with counsel and a commitment to purity.

Holding her hand, I learned that day how the value of just being present with someone can mean more than speaking empty platitudes when so much is not known. We look for answers when we see others in pain. Anxiety adds to our grief when seeming delays and detours press against our desires for an immediate response from God. In such a situation, Jesus reminded His disciples that He works for the Father’s glory (John 11:4) and to build our faith (v. 15).

Our trust becomes more resilient when we follow Jesus without yet seeing how He will bring about good. Faith isn’t about making our circumstances predictable but, rather, about sustaining confidence in the goodness and consistency of God’s character. Believing that He will be our answer helps us remain confident while waiting on Him.

Father, when the darkness of disappointment tries to shape my understanding of Your love for me, be my counselor. Empower me to set my feet on the truth of the Word, looking beyond my expectations and to Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What Jesus Sees

“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

Scripture: John 11:38-45

Song: “Majesty”

These days, I often see a yellow plastic tablecloth spread across my living room floor. In the middle sits our son with paintbrushes, assorted tubes of paint, and pencil sketches around him. A visual artist, he is working on his portfolio for college admissions. When he frequently asks for my feedback, I find it interesting that while I can see the picture only by what paint has been put to canvas so far, he, as the artist, sees its completion in his mind.

Our lives are often like an artist’s canvas in process. When we see our prayers answered, we learn to walk in wisdom, we are able to sense God’s peace in the middle of our difficulties, and we see how God is at work in us. But when answers don’t come—or like Mary and Martha, we face circumstances that bring great pain—we have difficulty trusting the eye and hand of the artist who created us.

Jesus reminded Mary and Martha that the picture was bigger than the stone resting firmly in front of the grave. They could see only loss, but Jesus saw new life, not just for Lazarus but also for those who would believe in Jesus because of Lazarus’s testimony (John 11:42, 45). In this way, the incomplete “canvas” becomes a beautiful work of art when our lives reveal the glory of God to those around us.

Father, may I learn to trust You in every circumstance, especially when life is most difficult. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Remember

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5).

Scripture: Luke 24:5-10

Song: “He Is Alive”

I remember well the day my family buried my dad, 25 years ago. The graveside services had finished, and we stood talking with those who had come to celebrate his life. Ready to leave the cemetery, I laid my hand on my dad’s casket, as if to touch him one last time.

Holidays, milestones with my family, and even ordinary days stir me to remember that day. Like the women who bowed before the empty grave, we experience loss and expect it to be final. For the believer, however, our stories do not end with the grave. What appears final on earth reminds us of what Jesus accomplished through His resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

The question the angels asked the women is an interesting one: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5). Clothed in grief, the women had come with spices for the body (v. 1). They were expecting the dead, not the living, because their hopes had died when Jesus took His last breath on the cross. The angels, however, saw from Heaven’s perspective, and they knew the tomb was not the end of the story. Jesus is alive, and out of His resurrection comes that same eternal life for anyone who believes in Him.

Father, nothing, not even death, can defeat what Jesus bought in victory. Thank You that my life is defined by eternity and not by what I see here on this earth. Help me to live even more with this hope in view. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Less Than Everything

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45).

Scripture: Luke 24:44-53

Song: “The Word of God Has Spoken”

The final segment to T. S. Eliot’s poem “Little Gidding” exposes the insufficiency of earthly pursuits in answering eternal questions. We often chase what cannot satisfy, but Eliot points the reader to God who does satisfy us when we seek Him, through the revelation of Scripture, and respond in faith.

Eliot places parentheses around his all-or-nothing thesis in the final stanza of the poem. Parentheses typically identify the enclosed words as less important—but not so here. Jesus satisfies our questions on eternal destiny because of what He accomplished by giving up everything. That was the Father’s plan all along. The Father withheld nothing, not even His beloved Son, so that all who receive Him can be free. This is a gift so significant that it requires our response of nothing less than our everything. When we willingly surrender ourselves by faith, giving up what does not matter and will not meet our needs, we see the Lord as He truly is. It is then that we find we are transformed by His power—the same power demonstrated in the resurrection—and restored to worship the one who gave His all in loving us completely.

Father, You have given us Your Son, wrapped in flesh like ours to take on the brutality of our sin. You have rescued me from death. I surrender all of myself to You in gratitude. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Truth Revealed

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35).

Scripture: Luke 2:28-35

Song: “Restore My Soul”

“The Lord knows my heart” is a true statement, but people might sometimes speak the phrase as if it’s an exemption from accountability to the Word of God or other believers. It can carry an unspoken but false idea that truth can be altered for one’s circumstances.

Truth, however, isn’t subjective. Jesus revealed the truth that we must face. Simeon declared to those who could hear him, as well as declaring to all the nations, that all people will fall or rise depending on our individual response to the truth about Jesus. Whether or not Simeon understood specifically the brutal death that awaited Jesus, Simeon’s words are clear: Jesus calls us to face the truth and the decision of the cross.

God alone is uniquely qualified to search our hearts, and it is His standard, not our own, that matters. Who we are—and even more so, our response to Christ and our love for Him—cannot be separated from the decisions we make. Though the sword brings pain, the promise of restoration and its resulting beauty is unmistakable (Luke 2:30-32). Salvation is here. Recognize the truth. Receive the light of Jesus.

Father, lead me in Your truth. Forgive me for allowing my circumstances, emotions, or reasoning to supersede Your Word. May my heart and the way I live always align with the truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Living Full

“Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:18).

Scripture: Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21; 21:8-9

Song: “Let the Heavens Open”

Most people would come, worship God, and then go. But not Anna. A resident worshipper in the temple for decades, she worshipped God and prayed night and day (Luke 2:37) awaiting the coming Messiah. And when He arrived, she was prepared. All the people and activity did not disturb her focus on God and His anointed.

The prophet Anna poignantly captures our attention in Luke’s Gospel narrative of Christ’s first days on earth. In all that life held for her, she remained steadfast, her heart set on the promises God had spoken through His prophets. Her story is like those who gathered on the Day of Pentecost. For all of them, their lives became oriented to one purpose—whether at the temple or on the streets—to live in the fullness of God’s Spirit poured out for us.

The work of the Holy Spirit becomes evident when we seek God and His work among us more than any other activity or priority in our lives.

Father, thank You for pouring out the Holy Spirit for us. Make me ever more attentive to Your voice and Your initiative in the world. Help me position myself in a place of continual worship, always ready to respond to what You are doing in and around me in the here and now as well as for eternity. In Jesus’ name, amen.