

citizenship is elsewhere—while they temporarily reside in a dwelling-place they know, they have not yet arrived at their real home. Christ-followers, even in the most stable and secure places, often feel like a “duck out of water.”

But on the other hand, we Christ-followers are the salt of the earth. We live to display the Light of Christ, to give evidence to his gospel and his kingdom and to serve others in his name.

We may be confused and bewildered, but we are not overcome. We may feel out of place, but we know we are in place as we follow Jesus Christ. We may feel left behind by our culture and society, but our faith informs us Christ-followers are never left behind by Jesus. No matter how great the turmoil, Christ-followers experience stability, peace and rest in him.

We take heart, filled with joy, thankful that Jesus has overcome all cultures and all adversaries, and that no innovation or device or imagination or invention can surpass Jesus.

Jesus is our Rock. He is our Hope. He is our Anchor, the Captain of our ship and the Chief Shepherd who watches over us. We may be in shock as we live out the turmoil of upheaval all around us, but we are never, as Christ lives in us, obsolete.

Jesus is our guiding Light, our Living Water and our Daily Bread. Jesus is our Vine to whom we are attached, and by whom we bear fruit of service and spiritual sustenance to others. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. □

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## Today Is a Gift

### Ed Dunn

*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. —Psalm 90:12*



**W**e sat together in the cold doctor's office at County Hospital in Los Angeles, California. It had been a long two-day stretch of testing and we were both tired. I was there as a friend, and yet, I was there as far more than just a friend. I was there in that doctor's office to be her memory, and to try my best to also be her voice.

Several years earlier, things had begun to change dramatically for my friend, my ex-wife and the mother of our daughter. Her speech had become labored, garbled and often hard to understand. She'd begun to speak in incoherent sentences more often than in clear ones. On top of the speech challenges, her memory seemed to become cloudy, patchy, and she had difficulty in remembering events we both knew well. Sometimes, when her level of utter frustration with these difficulties would boil over and bring her to tears, she couldn't speak or remember at all.

***Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why we call it 'The Present.'***

***—Eleanor Roosevelt***

And, so we sat, waiting for the doctor to come into the office and give us his news. As we did, I held her hand and took a moment to reflect upon our family history. We'd been married for nearly fourteen years. We had a child together, twelve years in, after believing we'd never be able to become pregnant. Sadly, due to a number of issues we just couldn't seem to resolve, we divorced not long after our daughter's arrival. Somehow though, we'd made it through the pain and heartache of it all. Somehow, we'd found a



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friendship beneath the relationship, and raised our daughter from there. And so, we sat together, waiting for whatever might come.

*Primary Progressive Aphasia* is a type of neurological condition that impacts a person's ability to speak. As the tissue in the area of the brain impacted continues to deteriorate, speech becomes labored, garbled and often hard to understand. The fact that this was happening to someone in her early fifties was a complete shock. Unable to tell us much of why this was happening, we had little to go on as we prepared to share the news with our daughter.

The news was sure to hit our daughter hard. For years, the relationship between mother and daughter had been, well, far from easy. Appropriate to the age of the teenage years, our daughter and her mother butted heads quite frequently. The communication they could have was often sharp, impatient and followed by a series of slammed doors. As even more patience would now be required, given what we'd learned, to allow time for her mother to get her thoughts and feeling out, we knew we were in for a tough stretch in life. Although I lived in a different home than they, I'd do whatever I could to try and help them both deal with the level of frustration.

The truth was, I couldn't do all that much.

*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom*, the Psalmist writes. In more modern vernacular, the often-used phrase, *hindsight is 20/20* captures some of the thought, as well. As the lyrics of an old Joni Mitchell song repeat, *you don't know what you got till it's gone*. As we never know what life may bring, many voices gently remind us that today is a gift and we are fortunate if we can appreciate what we have when we have it.

We never know what life may bring. Indeed, *tomorrow is a mystery*. My friend, my ex-wife and the mother of our daughter is now living in a full-time care facility for patients with aphasia and dementia, not far from her birthplace and the home of her sister in South Africa. She is safe, well-cared-for and surrounded by friends in a similar circumstance. Our daughter, now finishing up her undergraduate degree, lives here in California with me, when she's not away at school.

Our daughter grieves deeply for her mother and would give anything to have a conversation with her now. It's not so much the distance between South Africa and Southern California, nor the many time-zones in between, that's to blame. It's no longer, in any way, the frustration of those teenage years now long past. The truth is she can't have a conversation—her mother can't speak in coherent sentences and our daughter grieves that her mother doesn't seem to remember her. All she wants is to go back to a time when she could communicate with her mother. I grieve deeply for them both.

As much as we might want to, we can't go back in time. *Yesterday is history*. In this sense, life can be quite cruel, as we don't always recognize *the gift of the present* at the time we have it. We don't always remember to live fully in the moment we have, when we have it. Hindsight is all-too-often our best point of clarity, but that doesn't mean there's great comfort in it.

All we can do is try to make the most of today. *Today is a gift*. Today, we can try our best to live out the grace, mercy and peace we have in Christ. We can remember that he will help us, especially when life seems unfair, and even cruel. He is our comfort and we can grieve in him. □

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