

# MINDFUL MOMENTS



A 366-DAY MEDITATION

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## ABOUT MINDFUL MOMENTS: A LESSON IN MINDFULNESS

In reflecting on my journey as a writer, my first book was *To Encourage You: Essays on Christian Themes for Hope and Wholeness*. Evident from its title, encouragement was the focus of this collection of essays that was published in 2018. Subsequently, *Promises for You: Daily Affirmations for Inspiration and Motivation* and *Grace and Gratitude: A 40-Day Thanksgiving Meditation* were written to continue encouraging people everywhere. In many ways, my 10th book, *Mindful Moments: A 366-Day Meditation*, is the latest installment in a body of work whose purpose is to encourage you.

Whether during your personal quiet time in the morning, while taking a break from your job responsibilities in the middle of the day, with a small group of friends or colleagues, or before closing your eyes for well-deserved rest in the evening, intentionally create space to not only read each entry in *Mindful Moments*, but also pause long enough to be present (mindful) and reflect on what the message is for you. Because we are prone to forget, even the important things in life, record your thoughts in the spaces that have been provided for you. And if you don't know what to write, these prompts might be helpful. First, how does this meditation speak to me? Next, what is God saying to me through this meditation? Last, what do I need to do—what action, if any, do I need to take—based on what God is showing me through this meditation?

In the spirit of transparency, although I'm speaking to you through the 366 entries in this book, I'm also speaking to and encouraging myself. Even while writing these introductory thoughts, I realized that I needed the message that's

reinforced throughout the pages of this inspirational journal. Trying to finish the book by a certain date, and while juggling numerous projects, I became overwhelmed. But as quickly as these slightly stressful feelings came upon me, I remembered the truths that are shared in this book. That enough for today is enough. That sometimes we simply need to slow down. That rather than rushing the process, we must trust the process. And perhaps most importantly, that everything happens in the fullness of time, which is God's time.

Having found strength through writing and compiling these inspirational meditations, may the same happen for you as you spend mindful moments reading *Mindful Moments*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'C', 'A', and 'R' in a cursive, stylized font. The 'C' is a simple loop, the 'A' has a small peak, and the 'R' has a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

# DEDICATION

*To everyone who needs to be uplifted,  
motivated, inspired, and encouraged.*

JANUARY 1  
YOU WILL FINISH

Today is the first day of a new year. And while many people's New Year's resolutions include what they are going to start doing—exercising regularly, eating healthier meals, getting sufficient rest—I'm not going to talk about resolutions or starting anything new. Instead, I believe that this year is when we will finish what we've already started.

Though the world in which we live is governed by calendars, and January 1 is a significant marker for many, what God does isn't determined by when the calendar year begins and ends. Whether you started something last year, within the last 5 years, or even 10 or 20 years ago, here are two truths to encourage you. First, don't be discouraged. Next, you will finish this year.

Some of you know that I earned my undergraduate degrees in psychology and English in three years. And because this was relatively easy, I knew that I would complete my PhD studies in school psychology in five years. But alas, sometimes life unfolds in ways that we don't anticipate. I'll spare you the details, but five years became 11. Nevertheless, I finished; and you will finish, too.

Maybe you've started a degree and it's taking you longer than expected to finish. Maybe you've started writing a book and it's taking longer than you thought to finish. Maybe you've started the process of purchasing your first home or reaching another milestone and you're frustrated with how long everything is taking. If you can identify with such frustration, I've been there—more than once—and know how you feel. And because I've been there (past tense), I also know how it feels (present tense) to be on the other side of a significant goal.

If I had to use one scripture as my thematic focus for the year, it would be the 6th verse of Philippians chapter 1: "I'm convinced that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it through to completion..." In other words, God, the one who started something in you, and the one who placed dreams and desires inside of you, will be faithful (committed) to completing that which has been started.

This year, you will finish.

Be encouraged. I am praying for you.



A series of 18 horizontal lines for writing.



JANUARY 2

## GOD: MASTERPIECE MAKER, PART 1

Having crossed over into a new year, we can certainly look back and marvel at what we've come through. Although the other side of challenges is beautiful to behold, while going through these situations, they are often quite messy. But what's so amazing about God is God's ability to take (work with) our messiness and transform it into something marvelous and meaningful.

As a young and developing musician, I remember playing alongside some extremely skilled musicians that I admired, and for whom I had tremendous respect. One such musician was Rev. Byron Preston. When I met Byron, he was the organist for a church in my hometown of Freeport, New York: Little Zion Church of God in Christ (COGIC). It was the mid-late 1990s, and I remember playing a song on the organ. Byron was playing the keyboard and I was amazed by what he did that allowed me to sound so much better. While playing the relatively few chords and progressions that I knew, he played around what I was playing and made me sound like I truly knew what I was doing.

And that's exactly what God does: more than a skilled artist, but the master (ultimate) artist, God has a way of taking whatever we have, even the messiness of our lives, and making it into something truly magnificent.

As you look back over your life, recalling the times that God took what was messy and made it into a masterpiece, be encouraged knowing that God is still skilled enough to work with anything we have and make it absolutely beautiful.



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 20 parallel lines spaced evenly down the page. The lines are thin and black, set against a plain white background.

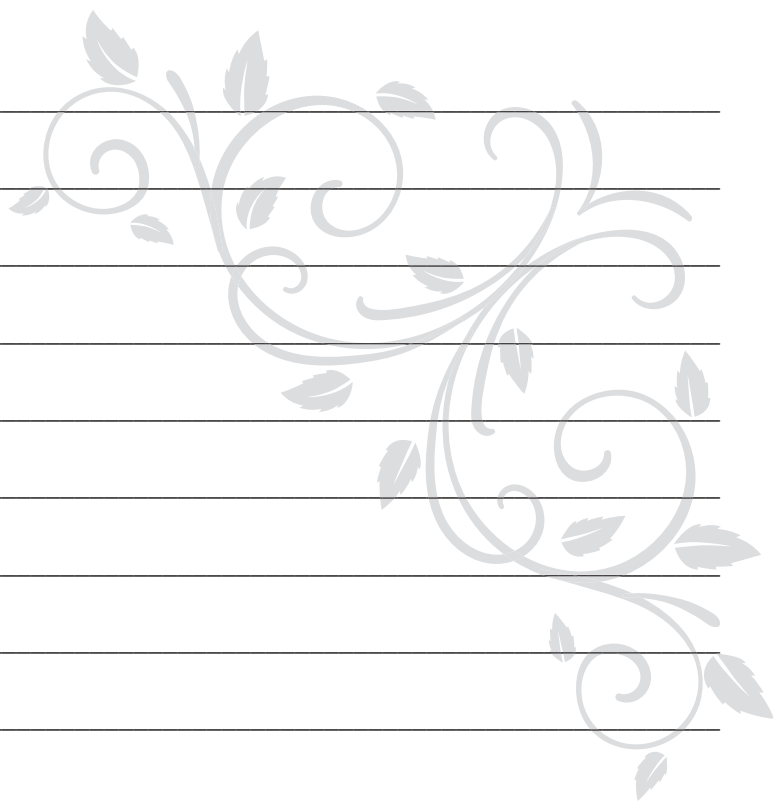
JANUARY 3

## GOD: MASTERPIECE MAKER, PART 2

Have you ever seen an artist who seems to throw paint haphazardly and carelessly on a canvas, but in a few moments creates something that is nothing short of stunning? Having watched a video on social media that showed someone doing this, it encouraged me, and I want to encourage you, too.

Yesterday I shared with you that the messiness of our lives is no challenge or concern for God. The master artist, God envisions what shall be long before anyone, including you and me, can see it or perhaps believe it. As the Alpha and Omega, God stands at the beginning and already knows the end. Similarly, before abstract artists throw paint on blank canvases, they already know (see) what they're going to create. But not only does God have vision, seeing the end from the beginning, God also has the ability to make the vision reality. Whether artists' seemingly random movements on canvases, or using ordinary objects that look like pieces of paper as part of their process, every action is deliberate—intentionally creating what they have in mind.

And so it is with God: because everything that God does is purposeful, nothing (absolutely nothing) is wasted or left to chance. So, whatever you're going through and have already gone through, be encouraged knowing that God will use all these things to masterfully create the masterpiece that is your life.



A series of horizontal lines for writing, consisting of 16 evenly spaced lines that span the width of the page. The lines are thin and black, providing a guide for text entry.

JANUARY 4  
GOOD STRESS AND BAD STRESS

There is stress in letting go and there is stress in holding on for too long. If you are secure in your career or your life is comfortable, letting go of what's familiar can be difficult (stressful). But knowing that it's time to do something different, or perhaps the same thing differently, holding on to what's safe can be uneasy and unsettling (stressful).

In the opening days of a new year, hold on to everything that God has done for you and every promise that God has spoken to you. Because everything else—fear, doubt, uncertainty— isn't worth the stress of holding onto, quickly let go of these things.

Holding on to what God said, especially when it doesn't align with what we see, isn't always easy. And letting go of what we know is sometimes just as stressful. But here's my encouragement to you: choose the stress that will catapult you into what God has for you.



JANUARY 5  
NO HASSLE RETURNS

After purchasing an item, I recently had to return it. Though I've done this many times before, I was struck by how easy the process was on this occasion.

As a rather serious shopper, I also value excellent customer service. And a part of such customer service is what I've come to know as *no hassle returns*. In fact, some companies advertise this to incentivize shopping with them. In its simplest terms, no hassle returns means no judgment, no questions asked, and no unnecessary hoops to jump through when you're returning an item. You simply receive what you've asked for: returning the item for a full refund.

Having experienced one of the smoothest and expeditious transactions ever, I was reminded that God has the absolute best return policy. Certainly, we don't refer to it as such; but when we ask God to forgive us, we're essentially returning what we no longer want (e.g., things we've done) in exchange for the peace of God that comes with forgiveness and restoration.

Let's read the Contemporary English Version of 1 John chapter 1 verse 9:

*But if we confess our sins to God,  
he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.*

It doesn't matter what we've done, God freely and fully forgives us. And because God's mercy endures forever (Psalm 136), there is no statute of limitations for forgiveness. In other words, it doesn't matter how long ago it happened, whenever we ask, God unconditionally forgives us.

Yes, I appreciate no hassle returns from my favorite retail stores; but I'm even more grateful for God's no hassle forgiveness.





JANUARY 6  
AMAZING GRACE

In the words of John Newton<sup>1</sup>, God's grace is amazing. And while amazing appropriately describes grace, there will never be a word that can sufficiently summarize or comprehensively capture everything that grace is to those who receive it.

Much can be said about grace; but today I want to encourage you, perhaps remind you, that grace is for everyone. In other words, grace isn't only for me, but it's also for those around me. Grace isn't reserved for those who consider themselves to be saints, but it's also available to those whom some might call sinners. Because it cannot be earned by what we do (Ephesians chapter 8 verses 8 and 9), grace isn't only for victors; it's for anyone who has been victimized by vicious and traumatic experiences. Albeit counterintuitive, and even more difficult to comprehend, grace isn't only for the one who has been abused; it's also for the abuser.

John Newton, the one who wrote one of the most recognizable songs in history, was a British sailor and captain of ships that carried enslaved people. The person who penned such powerful and timeless lyrics was also guilty of purchasing and selling people as property. Though it doesn't make sense, and seems even more unfair, the grace that he received as the enslaver turned abolitionist was also given to those who were enslaved.

Perhaps what's so amazing about grace is that it's expansive enough to include all of us. And because it is so expansive and inclusive, if there's grace for one of us, there's grace for all of us. And if there isn't grace for all of us, there isn't grace for any of us.

Despite where you might find yourself, and despite what you're doing or have done, the gift of God's amazing, expansive, and inclusive grace is available to you today and throughout all your tomorrows.

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<sup>1</sup> Newton, J. (1779). *Amazing Grace, Olney Hymns in Three Books* (p. 53). W. Oliver.



JANUARY 7  
AN ABUSE OF GRACE

Yesterday's meditation was focused on God's grace not only being amazing, but it's also for everyone. Without a doubt, that is great news.

Romans chapter 5 verses 20 and 21:

*God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Continuing into chapter 6, these words are found in verses 1 and 2a:

*Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not!*

As a school psychologist, I often understand why children do what they do by applying behavioral principles. In other words, what is the consequence (result) of their behavior that also makes them likely to repeat what they're doing? Whereas some children are reinforced (motivated) by attention from their peers or teachers, others are reinforced by avoiding (escaping) something that's challenging or simply not preferred. While thinking about this concept, I realized that there's a connection to grace, especially the first two verses of Romans chapter 6.

Similar to receiving attention from people or escaping certain situations, grace can also be reinforcing. How? Well, because of grace, we receive more (better) than we expected. So, despite doing what we shouldn't have done (e.g., sin), if the outcome is better (more positive) than it should have been, this can be reinforcing—leading us to continue engaging in the same [sinful] behavior. We even risk convincing ourselves that, "Because things didn't turn out as bad as they could have, what I'm doing must be okay, so I'll keep doing these things." Consider this: despite not studying for an exam or waiting until the last minute to start a major project, a student passes with flying colors. Because the outcome (grade) was much better than expected, the student is reinforced for not studying and procrastinating, and will likely continue these poor academic habits.

Although not studying and procrastinating aren't sinful, the principle noted in the opening verses of Romans chapter 6 remains: just because grace is available (abounds) doesn't mean that we should continue doing what we know we shouldn't be doing. Said another way, let's be sure that the abundance of grace doesn't lead to an abuse of grace.

