



fledge
flēj: to grow the plumage necessary for flight



Scouting the Present

Sitting in the backyard today, I stared into the grass—its leggy spouts shoot up, reaching for the sky. I imagine myself really small inside that jumble of greens, scouting out the ant-hill mountains and the mole caverns deep, deep down. Lost in that thought, the whirring sound of nature's helicopter hovers on the salvia by the window. The hummingbird slurps at the flower and whirrs away. Lady Jane sits at my feet. I can hear the cadence of her panting. When I look down at her, she looks up at me. I look away. I do it again, she glances up again. It's in the nature of herding dogs to contemplate. As I learn to be more aware of the Present, I learn she already is.

Gerald May, in his book *Wisdom in the Wilderness*, explains what contemplation really means. I think we all have an idea of what it is, but here's his definition:

Contemplation is a state of awareness that is wide-open and completely present to whatever is going on in the immediate moment.ⁱ

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Contemplation allows us to pay attention. To see the important things. To be alert to joy, hope, danger, love, and beauty.

I think city-life (the same kind imported by television and radio) tempts us away from

*Is it bending the grass,
trees, twirling your hair?*

contemplation. It teaches us to be focused on itself, imitate itself, throw money at itself, and be dull to our surroundings. We don't have time to pay attention because we're also too busy doing stuff. Or we are busy feeling guilty or worried or hushing pain.

We learn to drown out the noise inside and out. Some people take medication to drown out some of their inner noise so they can work more efficiently. And society today has placed such a large emphasis on efficiency (getting things done fast) and productivity (getting MORE and MORE done), we generate the same habits, acting like fast machines, and simply cut out the things that get in the way.

But we are not machines. We are humans. And we were made to be alert.

Whether you are in the city or the country, do an exercise with me. Go outside to the corner block or into the woods or in a field or in your own bedroom



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or wherever you can be part of the environment that surrounds you. And practice paying attention. Let's scout out the Present.

*The Present is where
Eternity touches Time.*

Listen to the horn honking as the car whizzes by. Look at the floating moth alighting on the tree. That moth will

probably live completely unnoticed but for this moment of you paying attention. How are the clouds moving? What are people doing as they walk past you? How do the crickets sound? Can you feel your own heartbeat? Do you hear the wind? Which way is it blowing? Is it bending the grass, trees, twirling your hair? Do you smell exhaust or the sweet scent of rain clouds as they move over the valley?

Close your eyes and take in the sounds as much as you can.

Close your ears and take in the sights as much as you can.

Close your ears and eyes and take in the smells as much as you can.

As David says, "Be still and know" (Psalm 46:10).



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Do this for a short while. Be alert. Live in the moment. All of this is happening. Welcome to the Present. It is around you. You are IN it.

C. S. Lewis once remarked, "The Present is where Eternity touches Time."

We move with Time, burdening on our shoulder a growing knapsack of memories. We lived in yesterday and we'll likely live in tomorrow. And we move along Time the same way we move from home to school to the coffee shop.

Some philosophers tell us that the Past and the Future don't even exist. The Past is gone and the Future is not yet here. The Present is all we have. It is our little home.

Paraphrasing Robert Grudin,

To appreciate Time we must not just sample it, we must take a voyage into it, expand within its vastness.ⁱⁱ

But we have a way of drawing ourselves away from the Present.



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Perhaps we feel guilty about something we did. Guilt is an emotion that draws us into the Past. It makes us look back. It haunts us from behind.

Or perhaps we are afraid or worried. Maybe there is a science test or a doctor's appointment or a school dance that is approaching. These things generate fear in us. We want to score well on our tests. We want the doctor to say we are healthy. We want to go with the right person to the dance. But we simply don't know if we will. And we are afraid. Fear is an emotion that draws us into the future. It makes us look forward. It beacons us from the front.

Guilt and fear are two major distractions that keep us from the Present. And if the Present is where Time touches Eternity, then how much of Eternity are we missing as the Present passes unnoticed? How much of life are we not enjoying because our focus is in every other place in Time but the moment we're sitting in?

Jesus said not to worry about tomorrow because his Kingdom is big enough to fill it all. He also said not to worry about the past, because full forgiveness is available from Him. Jesus has carved out the Present for us, freeing us from the shackles of the Past and the Future.



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This moment, like every moment, is God's moment. Is it any surprise that the word *Present* is related to the word *Presence*? When we sit in the Present, we are welcomed to sit in His Presence. Here, in this moment, Time becomes the most personal. This moment is the one that matters. Sit in it. Drink it in. Be alert and aware and alive. Let Time bend toward Eternity. Practice scouting out the present and you may find Someone is already there waiting for you.

When we sit in the Present, we are welcomed to sit in His Presence.

ⁱ Gerald May, *The Wisdom of the Wilderness: Experiencing the Healing Power of Nature*, 61.

ⁱⁱ Robert Grudin, *Time and the Art of Living*, 4.

Got questions/comments?
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