

A DayReader™ book

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NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR

# celebrate every day

seeing the  
extraordinary  
in the  
ordinary

ZONDERVAN

*Celebrate Every Day*

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Portions of this book were excerpted and adapted from *Cold Tangerines: Celebrating the Extraordinary Nature of Everyday Life* (9780310273608).

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ISBN 978-1-4003-4422-2 (audio)  
ISBN 978-1-4003-4420-8 (eBook)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on File**

ISBN 978-0-310-16786-0

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Published in association with The Christopher Ferebee Agency.

Art direction: Jamie DeBruyn

Cover design: Jamie DeBruyn

Cover image: istockphoto

Interior design: Kristy Edwards

*Printed in the United States of America*

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# Introduction

It's a cool gray morning in New York, and as I write at my beloved child-sized desk-slash-nightstand, I'm looking out the window at scaffolding. New York City is obsessed with scaffolding. Put simply, scaffolding is the structure put up around a building that, for whatever reason, needs support. Maybe it's old and needs to be repaired. Or maybe it's mid-renovation. Or maybe it's new construction, and the scaffolding is less for the building and more for the safety of the people walking by, so nothing falls on them mid-construction. Scaffolding provides safety and support while a building is being transformed in some way.

Here's something I've learned the hard way: what we do every day matters far more than what we do once in a while. The daily routines and rhythms that we build to scaffold our days do more to shape who we become than the grand gestures of once-in-a-while ever could.

Especially when we're in the middle of transformation of any kind, it's the things we do every day that build a meaningful support along the way. I've had to learn, in

tough seasons, how to build my own scaffolding, and one of the most important ways I do that is by reading every morning. Reading gives me a place to sort through all the wild ideas I collect in the night, and it helps give perspective and clarity for the day ahead.

My dream for this book is that it would be a grounding and clarifying way for you to begin the day. Reading and considering a few meaningful thoughts or questions is a beloved part of my morning routine, and I'd be honored if these pages became a companion in your own routine. It would bring me so much joy to think of you in your cozy quiet moments before the day starts whirling at full volume.

I began my writing life with a handful of deeply held beliefs: that our daily lives matter so deeply, that they're all we have, and that if we learn to look for beauty and divinity and magic right in our own living rooms and kitchen tables, we'll begin to see those sparks of beauty more and more often. That's what this book is about: being the kind of people who see.

What a beautiful image: all of us in all our homes—in our tiny city apartments or farmhouses or dorms, all of us choosing to begin our days with the belief that those days are worth loving, worth investing in, worth savoring, worth holding with both hands, and more than anything, worth celebrating.

# What Matters Most

I believe that everyday life as it's unfolding on our plain old streets and sidewalks is the most extraordinary thing most of us will ever experience. I believe that daily life is where our lives change, where we learn to love, where we learn from our mistakes, where we sense God's presence, where we learn to tell the truth and make things right, where our hearts are broken and our wounds are laid bare and healed up. So many of the lofty concepts of faith and truth and meaning find their value and grounding not in conceptual spaces but in kitchens and living rooms and subway stations and in the silence between words and while you're folding the laundry. This is where life is. This is where everything is.

For me, it's all about daily, ordinary life. It's all about being a noticer, as a spiritual act. I notice as a way of saying thank you, as a sacrament almost, as a way of bearing witness to what's lovely and good and meaningful in the world.

I love to cook, and there are a few people in my life over the years who've been my favorite people to feed, and what I love about feeding those people is how much they notice—they eat with passion, full mouths, full plates, and they notice

color and flavor and texture. They ask questions and close their eyes while they're chewing, trying to taste even more deeply. As a cook, as the person who chose the flavors, who chopped and sautéed and thought about color and texture and scent and plating, I love feeding people who notice.

I want to be a noticer. God made this world, made people, made flowers and honey and the Hudson River. The people he made with great love and in his image have written poetry and built buildings, and they perform surgery and bake bread and play the violin, and one of my most deeply held spiritual practices is noticing it all.

At the end of the day, this is what matters most to me: bearing witness to the unfolding miracle of everyday life.

Right now, notice as much as you can—what do you see? What do you smell? What are you hearing, touching, noticing around you?

## DAY 2

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# Shameless Celebration

I know that the world is several versions of mad right now. I know that pessimism and grimness sometimes seem

like the only responsible choices. I wake up at night and think about war and pesticides and global warming and fundamentalism and disease and crime. I worry about the world we're creating for my baby boy. I get the pessimism and the grimness.

And that's why I'm making a shameless appeal for celebration. Because I need to. I need optimism and celebration and hope in the face of violence and despair and anxiety. And because the other road is a dead end. Despair is a slow death, and a lifetime of anger is like a lifetime of hard drinking: it shows in your face and your eyes and your words even when you think it doesn't.

The only option, as I see it, is this delicate weaving of action and celebration, of intention and expectation. Let's act, read, protest, protect, picket, learn, advocate for, fight against, but let's be careful that in the midst of all that accomplishing and organizing, we don't bulldoze over a world that's teeming with beauty and hope and redemption all around us and in the meantime. Before the wars are over, before the cures are found, before the wrongs are righted, Today, humble Today, presents itself to us with all the ceremony and bling of a glittering diamond ring: *Wear me*, it says. *Wear me out. Love me, dive into me, discover me*, it pleads with us.

The discipline of celebration is changing my life, and it is because of the profound discoveries that this way of

living affords me that I invite you into the same practice. Celebration is a tap dance on the fresh graves of apathy and cynicism, the creeping belief that this is all there is, and that God is no match for the wreckage of the world we live in. What God does in the tiny corners of our day-to-day lives is gorgeous and headline-making, but we have a bad habit of saving the headlines for only the scary.

There are a lot of good books about what's wrong, what's broken, what needs fixing and dismantling and deconstructing. I read them, and I hope you do too. But there might be a little voice inside of you, like there is inside of me, a voice that asks, "Is that all? Is this all there is?" And to that tiny, holy voice, I say, "No way, kiddo, there's so much more, and it's all around us, and it's right in front of our eyes."

To choose to celebrate in the world we live in right now might seem irresponsible. But I believe it is a serious undertaking, and one that has the potential to return us to our best selves, people who choose to see the best, believe the best, yearn for the best. Through that longing to be our best selves, we are changed and inspired, able to see the handwriting of a holy God where another person just sees the same old tired streets and sidewalks.

The world is alive, blinking and clicking, winking at us slyly, inviting us to get up and dance to the music that's been playing since the beginning of time, if you bend all the way down and put your ear to the ground to listen for it.

What can you do to intentionally celebrate small things this week?

## DAY 3

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# On Waiting

I have always, essentially, been waiting. Waiting to become something else, waiting to be that person I always thought I was on the verge of becoming, waiting for that life I thought I would have. In my head, I was always one step away. In high school, I was biding my time until I could become the college version of myself, the one my mind could see so clearly. In college, the post-college “adult” person was always looming in front of me, smarter, stronger, more organized. Then the married person, then the person I’d become when we have kids. For my entire life, I have waited to become the next version of myself, because that’s when life will really begin.

And through all that waiting, here I am. My life is passing, day by day, and I am waiting for it to start. I am waiting for that time, that person, that event when my life will finally begin. John Lennon once said, “Life is what happens when you’re busy making other plans.” For me, life is what

was happening while I was busy waiting for my big moment. I was ready for it and believed that the rest of my life would fade into the background, and that my big moment would carry me through life like a lifeboat.

But this is what I'm finding, in glimpses and flashes: this is it. This is it, in the best possible way. That thing I'm waiting for, that adventure, that movie-score-worthy experience unfolding gracefully. This is it. Normal, daily life ticking by on our streets and sidewalks, in our houses and apartments, in our beds and at our dinner tables, in our dreams and prayers and fights and secrets—this pedestrian life is the most precious thing any of us will ever experience.

I believe that this way of living, this focus on the present, the daily, the tangible, this intense concentration, not on the news headlines, but on the flowers growing in your own garden, the children growing in your own home, this way of living has the potential to open up the heavens, to yield a glittering handful of diamonds where a second ago there was coal. This way of living and noticing and building and crafting can crack through the movie sets and soundtracks that keep us waiting for our own life stories to begin, and set us free to observe the lives we have been creating all along without even realizing it.

I believe that if we cultivate a true attention, a deep ability to see what has been there all along, we will find worlds within us and between us, dreams and stories and

memories spilling over. The nuances and shades and secrets and intimations of love and friendship and marriage and parenting are action-packed and multicolored, if you know where to look.

Today is your big moment. Moments, really. The life you've been waiting for is happening all around you. You have stories worth telling, memories worth remembering, dreams worth working toward, a body worth feeding, a soul worth tending, and beyond that, the God of the universe dwells within you. And you have been given today.

What are some daily things in your life that you might be missing out on, waiting for that Big Moment?

## DAY 4

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# Spark

I went to Westmont College, two thousand miles from my hometown. My decision to go there was partially out of heartbreak and desperation, having been rejected by my dream school, and partially out of a strange, deep feeling, a feeling I believe was God's urging.

During that season, all I could see about faith were the