



Simply TUESDAY

Small-Moment Living
in a Fast-Moving World



EMILY P. FREEMAN


Revell

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Emily P. Freeman, *Simply Tuesday*

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To my Tuesday people in Greensboro
with love and gratitude,
for saving a seat on the bench



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INTRODUCTION

One Inch above the Ground

When Jesus said to seek first the kingdom of God, where did he intend for us to look? And how will we know when we've found it?

Certainly I won't find it here, in my home office with the unswept rug, my unwashed hair, and a to-do list that outnumbers the stars. And yet, that seems to be exactly where Jesus pointed when the Pharisees asked him when the kingdom of God would come.

Specifically, he answered them this way: "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:20–21 NIV).

Someone once pointed out to me how, even though we always think of heaven as up—beyond the clouds, above the weather, and over the rainbow—it may not actually be *far* up.

"What if," this person wondered, "heaven is simply one inch above the ground?"

It's still up, but it's not so far away. Instead the kingdom of God exists right here in the moments where we live.

On some level, we already know this. Maybe you, like me, can recount moments in your life where it seemed you stepped through the invisible curtain dividing heaven and earth, where you nodded your head with misty eyes and thoughtful gaze, feeling the gauzy weight of eternity settle over the moment—at the wedding, the graduation, the birth of a baby, or even after a meaningful night with friends.

You already know life is sacred. You know the moments count. You know that most of the tasks on your to-do lists aren't all that important in the scheme of things.

And yet.

The constant buzzing inside your soul won't seem to quit.

That tight spot between your shoulders won't smooth out.

You know you need to slow and savor, but you're waiting until you finish this project or have that conversation or meet those people or achieve that success or finalize those decisions or get things organized.

By now I know the allure of hustle, how it feels both like winning and losing at the same time. As I watch the world move fast around me, I'm unsettled with all the ways I've adopted her pace. I talk fast, I walk fast, and I can finish tasks quickly when I need to. I've trained myself to ship and produce. At what cost? I'm not yet sure.

I'm thirty-seven years old, married to John for fourteen years, a mother of three, twin girls, Ava and Stella, who are eleven and a son, Luke, who is eight. I work from home writing books while my kids go to public school. I realize how simple that sounds, how dreamy actually. But make no mistake. While I may have a lot yet left to learn, one thing I know for sure is the

language of the game, the pull to comparison and competition, the feeling that the work I do is never quite enough. I know the pain of inefficiency, the addiction of ambition, the longing to build something important, and the disappointment that comes when the outcome looks different than I thought.

And the outcome nearly always looks different than I thought.

I really do believe that the presence of Christ makes a difference in my everyday life. But sometimes I forget. And when I forget, I try hard to keep up. Even while I am mildly successful at it at times, I'm also aware of a natural slowness deep within me that I'm either thankful for or fight against, depending on the day. If there's a movement, a buzz, or a current event happening around me, it often takes me so long to process my opinions and perspectives that by the time I've formed some, the movement has moved on, the buzz has died down, and the event is no longer current.

If there were a magazine dedicated to year-old events, I would be the proud, slow-moving editor-in-chief. I have to read lines in books several times before I can figure out why they made me cry. Conversations have to be sifted through over a period of days, even a week, before I'm certain if I was fully myself in them or not. The lessons I've learned in my life haven't been showy, glitzy, headline-worthy, or viral material. Instead, they've happened one small step at a time—a shift here, a conversation there, the same prayers over and over again.

Sometimes I worry I miss out on opportunities because of this. When I'm alone and haven't had enough sleep and have spent too much time on the internet, I wish I were different—more edge, less curve.

While I can get worked up and start pointing my fingers at all the ways the world values the great, the noisy, and the next

big thing, I'm hearing a whispered invitation pointing into the center of my own soul—where have I adopted these systems for myself?

In my exhaustion with this fast-moving world—the one that moves around me and the one that pounds within me—I turn to Jesus. “Hustle, produce, and ship” is not what I see in him.

My tendency is to turn my back on the world, to turn away, and to become critical. As I confess my own judgment of big-time living, I see that though the way of Jesus is different from the way of the world, his way is actually *all about the world*.

Jesus does not turn away from the world, but turns to face it. Jesus came down. He turns toward. He makes his face to shine upon. He shows compassion. He sits with. His with-ness is so important that every time we say his name, we declare it—Immanuel, God with us.

The way I have begun to practice confronting these systems within me is to do one of the most counterintuitive things I can think of: to remember my own smallness. And to not only tolerate it but to begin to look for it. In my search for smallness, I'm finding the kingdom of God one inch above the ground.

It doesn't look like I thought it would or think it should, but there it is, hiding under the piles of everyday life. God is where he always said he would be—in the whisper, in the shadows, in the seed.

I'm paying attention to the small ways that Jesus—and his kingdom—shows up in the daily ordinary, in the actual places where I live. When I think of where to find “the kingdom of God in our midst,” Tuesday comes to mind. This is the day of the week housing the regular, the ordinary, the plain, and the small.

Most of life happens, not in brightness or in darkness, but in the medium light of a regular day. And all those daily

things—the email inbox, the cluttered surfaces, the bag of old clothes, the deadlines, and the appointments—aren't to be set aside by those who hope to live a faithful life. Rather, embracing all of these is part of what *makes* a faithful life.

These regular tasks are the unlikely portals into the kingdom of God, and the goal isn't to set them aside but to recognize Christ with us in the midst of them.

The deepest need of my soul isn't a personal organizer or an empty inbox. The deepest need of my soul is Christ. But the problem is, I often forget where to find him.

What if God's intention for the world and me begins here, on my regular Tuesdays?

What if we decided to take back Tuesday from the wasteland of to-do lists and give it a prominent place in our walk of faith?

What if, instead of thinking we have to choose between our ordinary life and an extraordinary life, we began to realize they're the same thing?

What if we stopped asking God for big ways to serve him and started walking with our friend Jesus into the next simple moment in front of us?

I have a vision of a generation of believers who understand that the goal of life is Jesus and all the ways he wants to offer himself both to us and through us to the world.

I have a vision of people who make the invisible kingdom visible, sinking low to the ground, picking up our crosses and shoes off the floor, eating the bread of life and serving it up with peanut butter and jelly.

I have a vision of people who embrace the significance of our small words, knowing that whether they're spoken into microphones or near microwaves, they are all sacred when said in the power of the Spirit.

Let's take back quiet conversation with friends, whispered prayer over sick babies, belly laughter around the dinner table.

Let's take back the honor of small donations, small care packages, and small movements toward fellow image-bearers, because love isn't measured in inches, grand gestures, or dollar amounts.

Let's dare to take back that time when someone's words made us feel stupid, but instead of wallowing in the shame of it, we'll push through to the other side because directly after that painful conversation you saw a glimpse of strength and courage within you that wasn't there before and you have her to thank for it.

Let's take back the long days and the short years and all the months that come between them, because this is where our real life happens. And we won't be so naive as to try to make the hard times beautiful, but we will have faith that the hard days are making us, remaking us, and forming us into the likeness of Christ.

Let's take back moments that are lovely even if they are imperfect, words that are powerful even if only one person hears them, company that is meaningful even when we don't say any words at all.

Let's take back fame, the kind that comes from being born in a stable and teaching on a seashore and feeding up lunch to thousands from just a few loaves and fish; the kind of fame that comes from loving and saving the whole wide beautiful world.

Let's take it all back, these moments we've given away, thrown out with the leftovers and the papers we didn't think we needed. We left them behind in our pursuit of bigger and better and we've forgotten what's best.

We've been tricked into believing that higher up and further on equals impact and importance. And even those of us who don't *really* believe that still wince through the not-growing pains, when outcomes don't come out the way we hoped.

Maybe your small job with its small income leaves you feeling like you have a small influence.

Maybe you are discouraged because your small perspective and small vision has led you to believe you have a small faith.

Maybe your small house with your small people has somehow convinced you that you are too small to matter.

Maybe your small ministry in your small town gathers only a small group of people.

If hustle has hijacked your soul, listen up and listen well.

You're in good company here.

In my own life I've found it to be true that when I hold on to the wrong things, the wrong things hold on to me.

If the light of a Tuesday morning candle isn't bright enough to light the room, a spotlight won't be either.

If the home where we live on Tuesday doesn't satisfy, we'll find ourselves always searching but never quite finding.

If the work we do on Tuesday doesn't feel important, we'll find ourselves slaves to comparison, forgetting compassion.

If the people we live our lives with now aren't sacred companions for us, we'll find ourselves competing with everyone and connecting with no one.

If our souls long for more and bigger and refuse the Tuesday way, how will we ever fully share in the life of Christ who became less and arrived small?

If we parcel out our time and hold our plans in a vice-grip of what shall, will, and must be for our future, we may dismiss the small beginnings being born right here, on Tuesday

afternoon. We'll be pushed around by fear rather than be led by love.

Attention, success, and comparison hold my soul hostage and refuse to negotiate until they get what they want.

Spoiler alert: They want everything. And they are never satisfied. They will never let you go.

We need a rescuer to come and save us from the bondage of the lie that whispers we have to build and grow and be known by all.

The good news is we have one. The better news is he's already come. And the best news is he keeps showing up on our everyday Tuesdays, one inch above the ground.

As it turns out, Jesus doesn't come riding in on a white horse to save me from my humiliation, my daily work, my endless list. Instead, he whispers a quiet invitation to keep company with him the way he came to earth to keep company with us. It won't always feel like a rescue. It might feel like surrender. But on the other side of that space I find Jesus. I find his peace. I find his companionship.

Let's be people of the kingdom, the kind who have faith the size of mustard seeds and influence like the salt on our dinner plate. Jesus came to earth to extend a personal invitation for us to enter into his kingdom rather than try to build our own. Because his kingdom is with us and, more importantly, *within us*, the best place to find it is right where we are, on our regular Tuesdays. And the best people to reveal his kingdom to us are the Tuesday people in our midst.

I'm exploring what it looks like to release my obsession with building a life and embrace the life Christ is building in me, one small Tuesday at a time. I hope you'll come along.

Part I

Discovering Our TUESDAY Home

Less searching. More finding.

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.

—Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*

In this section, you are invited to:

- see your smallness as a gift and not a liability
- discover home right where you are
- release the obsession with building a life
- trust in the life Christ is building in you



CITIES & BENCHES

An Accidental Sighting of the Kingdom of God

Night: we cannot stop it, or hasten it; it just comes, and it teaches us every twenty-four hours that we are not in complete control.

—Father Iain Matthew, *The Impact of God*

In January 1994, an earthquake lasting up to twenty seconds hit the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles, California, causing nearly twenty billion dollars in damages and the deaths of nearly sixty people. Much of the city's power was lost because of the quake; radio and television stations were knocked off the air. That night, the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles began to receive odd phone calls from panicked citizens reporting a "strange sky." They speculated that perhaps the silver cloud above them somehow caused the earthquake.

After some confusion, the director of the observatory realized what was going on. With the city lights made powerless by the earthquake, for the first time maybe ever, the people living in Los Angeles looked up and saw a dark sky.

The scary, smoky, silver cloud they reported was the Milky Way. Today, two-thirds of the United States population and one-fifth of the world can't even see it.

A clear view of the solar system—and that awesome, unmooring, sublime, occasionally terrifying feeling that comes over us when we bear witness to the vastness of the universe and recognize our infinitesimal place in it—had been a routine nocturnal experience for the bulk of human history. Now it's become rarefied and, for some, unimaginable.¹

When I first read this article in *Men's Journal* last December, I laughed out loud. Those crazy people! Calling the observatory about the spooky cloud in the sky! Haven't they ever seen the Milky Way?

Wait a minute. I've never seen the Milky Way. It was a sobering realization. While I laughed at the citizens of Los Angeles only moments before, now I wondered if I too would have called the observatory with questions about the strange cloud in the sky. I considered the connection between the fast pace of my soul and my inability to see the stars at night. If I had a more regular reminder of my size on earth, would I live differently as a result?

My City Lights

I am a lover of the light. If I told you how many lamps are on in my house right now, well, let's just say Al Gore might show

up at my door and shake a finger in my face. Maybe I feel safer that way, with all the lights on.

I walk outside, the porch light spilling onto the yard. I am in control of my surroundings. After all, I can see my porch, the driveway, and part of our street. In a way I haven't fully appreciated or understood, the manufactured artificial light numbs the mystery of the dark, giving me a false sense of myself in relation to the world.

The way I move through my world on a daily basis is mostly efficient. And when it isn't, I have a little niggling in the back of my mind that I needlessly wasted time today. I know how to hustle, produce, and ship. But lately, I've had to honestly confront a real possibility: what if "hustle, produce, and ship" are my artificial lights?

I look up and see six stars, now seven. I am unaware. If I could turn the lights out, all the world's lights, how many stars would I see? One or two thousand? Five thousand on a moonless night? Would seeing them be enough to remind me I am small? Would I be relieved or would I close my eyes? Would I cry?

Several years ago I was struggling through a time of not understanding some things going on in my life, of being painfully misunderstood by some friends, and of beginning to feel the pressure of writing books, meeting deadlines, and hearing opinions on my work from strangers and friends alike.

I recognized within myself a deep desire to explain and defend my ideas, to be seen and heard for who I was, to grow my influence without selling my soul, and also to be able to somehow see a bigger picture of what it all meant. I was feeling the pain of smallness and I didn't like it. The lights were dim in my personal city and I wanted them to shine more brightly so I could find the answers I thought I needed.

It was in the midst of this struggle that a trusted mentor encouraged me with these strange words: “Celebrate your smallness.”² I wanted to see the big picture of my life and instead he told me to be small—not only to be small, but also to *celebrate it*.

If you’re anything like me, then the word *small* may not bring to mind kind or encouraging images. We tend to associate feeling small with negative experiences. In fact, I recently did a highly scientific study on this word and the situations that cause people to feel so. I asked on Facebook: *What kinds of things, situations, people, or circumstances cause you to feel small?* Here are some of the most common answers I received:

Being new at something and having to perform it in front of others.

Being misunderstood.

Being wrong.

Being corrected.

Being ignored.

Being embarrassed.

Being single when it seems everyone else isn’t.

Chaos.

Crowds.

Criticism.

Church people.

Women who look like they have it all together.

When work is unrecognized and passions are tossed aside by others.

When I’m first starting out.

When others know something I don’t.

Sarcastic people.

When I think of feeling small, I mainly consider the kind that comes as a result of humiliation. These are the kinds of things we say when we feel rejected. When someone says something insulting or disrespectful, we say they belittle us, making us feel “about this big.” (Hold up thumb and forefinger measuring an inch.) If people are stubborn or prejudiced, we call them small-minded. If your influence, vision, or dreams are small, you may be accused of being scared or lacking faith.

And then there are the more surface ways we use the word. We may feel discouraged if our house, our jeans, our portions, or our bank accounts are too small. *Small* becomes attached to *too*, and these two words together shape unwanted images within us: too small to satisfy, too small to have an impact, too small to be important, too small to make a difference, too small to see.

Small seems like the opposite of spacious, the opposite of enough, the opposite of free. All of these smalls lead to embarrassment, uncertainty, anxiety, or discontent. When this mentor of mine suggested I celebrate my smallness, I was thinking of it only in these kinds of terms—feeling lost, less-than, embarrassed, and alone. That doesn’t sound like much of a celebration.

But these aren’t our only experiences of smallness. In fact, in certain situations we experience a natural celebration of smallness.

When I asked the question on Facebook—*What kinds of things, situations, people, or circumstances cause you to feel small?*—several people asked the same clarifying question: *Do you mean the good kind of small or the bad kind of small?*

I am so glad they asked, because when I imagine what it means to feel small, other kinds of images come to mind as well. Here are some other answers I received that afternoon:

Creating art.
Standing near the ocean.
Looking at the stars.
When I'm trusted to care for children.
Walking through the woods.
When everything is covered in snow.

In his book *The Contemplative Pastor*, Eugene Peterson offers another perspective of small. “The metaphors Jesus used for the life of ministry are frequently images of the single, the small, and the quiet, which have effects far in excess of their appearance: salt, leaven, seed. Our culture publicizes the opposite emphasis: the big, the multitudinous, the noisy.”³

Jesus pointed out that faith, not only as small as a seed but one of the smallest seeds of all—the mustard seed—was enough to move a mountain.

Creation invites a vastly different image to this word *small*. Driving toward the mountains, standing on the beach, sitting beneath the sky on a moonless night—I feel small, but I like it this way. It's comforting, like I'm not in control and I wouldn't want to be.

In these places, I'm small enough to breathe in deeply, small enough to see what's happening, and small enough to let go, to be loved, to remember the with-ness of Christ. This kind of small carries wonder, gratitude, and peace. This kind of small leads to worship.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, small among Judah. He came as a baby, small among men. He began to build his kingdom in the womb of young Mary. Jesus himself arrived small on earth, but he was not insufficient or lacking in significance. Simply, he did not hold on to his own glory.

In her book *Shirt of Flame*, Heather King writes this: “I was reminded of contemplative theologian Richard Rohr’s theory that the opposite of holding on isn’t, as we tend to think, letting go—but rather participating in something greater than ourselves.”⁴

Small is an invitation to participate in something greater than ourselves. Isn’t this what Jesus did with his Father while on earth? Gave up his own glory so he could participate with the Father? In his smallness, Jesus wasn’t attempting to build a city. He had his sights set much higher. Jesus was here to establish a kingdom and his foundation was the whole world. But even Jesus didn’t seem to make it his business to grow it.

He constantly turned to his Father in everything, refusing to hold his own glory, walking as the most dependent man who ever lived. And now the Spirit of the most dependent man who ever lived has made his home in us.

Instead of forgetting or running from my own smallness, what if I chose instead to look it in the face, to settle down into the place where I am, to notice what is happening around me on my ordinary days? What if these small moments are the very portal into experiencing the kingdom of God? I believe they are—and if we miss them, we miss everything. We run right by the kingdom’s doors, and no matter where we go, we have missed the door that leads us home.

The City Builders

In the Bible, Cain is a good example of someone who refused to consider his small place on earth and, in turn, missed the kingdom of God.

As grown sons of Adam and Eve, Cain works the ground while his brother, Abel, tends the animals. They both bring a sacrifice to the Lord; Cain brings fruit from the ground and Abel brings the best of his flock. Abel's sacrifice is more pleasing to God than Cain's, so Cain, in his jealousy, kills his brother and then gets caught.

In Genesis 4:12, God says these words to Cain: "When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on earth."

And then comes what is to me one of the most heartbreaking verses thus far in Scripture: "Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (Gen. 4:16).

In his book *The Meaning of the City*, Jacques Ellul emphasizes the now homelessness of Cain. "Cain no longer has a home, either human or geographical, because murder destroys the home. And he who no longer has a home is condemned to death. A fugitive and a wanderer, he is even worse off than someone already in the grave."⁵

Cain has made a turn from which there is no going back. Taking his cues from his own idea of what home, security, and power should look like, he sets out to find security on his own terms and of his own making, apart from God. He enters into the land of Nod, the land of wandering, to begin his life.

Cain and his wife do two things after leaving the presence of God. First, they have a son, and second, they build a city. Cain gives both their son and the city the same name: Enoch, meaning "initiation" or "dedication."

Ellul says this about the significance of Cain's decision to have a child and build a city: "The first builder of a city thinks of his action as a response to his situation, an effort to satisfy

his deepest desires. He will satisfy his desire for eternity by producing children, and he will satisfy his desire for security by creating a place belonging to him, a city.”⁶

As much as I would like to distance myself from the choices Cain made, in a way I understand how building a city seems like the next right thing to do. City building keeps our souls occupied, our hands moving, and our hearts distracted. Cities are exciting and filled with activity. City building helps us forget what our souls most long for.

Our souls weren’t made to live without acceptance, without a home. But sin takes us to places we were never meant to go. And since living with rejection isn’t an option, we must find acceptance at any price. When our souls lose home, we set out to build a new home.

We start with a strange mix of raw materials: talent, skill, and hustle. We’ll use whatever we’ve got: strength, wisdom, beauty, and humor. We build this home up with lights and action, bustle and distraction, filled with satisfaction. For a while. But then, a fissure. A shift in the market. An earthquake. Unemployment. A heartbreak. A death. A grief that rolls right over you. And the lights of the city go out and we don’t recognize ourselves anymore. Where are my bearings? And what are those lights in the sky? Now a new kind of crisis settles in, the panic kind. Because I cannot continue in my own life when I feel this small. It hurts too much.

To be like Cain is to turn from God and establish my own city. I’ve done this in various ways—in my home, in my work, with my family, in my soul, and with my time.

I want to allow the Spirit to uncover the ways I’ve laid out my own blueprints over these sacred parts of my life. I want to invite him to take my hammer and my nails and, instead, bring me to a place to sit.

The Bench Dwellers

Our house sits at the top of a cul-de-sac, nestled between one neighbor who has lived here over forty-five years and a retired couple who have been here only a few years longer than we have. On the other side of that couple are John's brother, Frank, his wife, Mercedes, and their two young girls. They moved here first, and a few years later when this house had sat empty for a while, they suggested we try to buy it. After some stuff and things and negotiating, we did.

Our kids and our nieces were still riding tricycles at the time, so we often sat outside in the grassy center of the cul-de-sac to watch. Other kids from down the street would often come to join in, and John, Frank, Mercedes and I pulled out lawn chairs from the garage or spread out blankets on the grass to watch the kids play.

One afternoon while John's mom was visiting, she mentioned how nice it would be to have a couple of benches in the center of the circle, more permanent seating so we wouldn't always have to drag our lawn chairs out every time the kids wanted to play. Not one to suggest ideas without taking responsibility, she showed up several days later with a bench in a box in the back of her car. Days later, a neighbor bought a matching one.

Now we have two benches facing each other in front of our houses, like our little community of seven homes finally has a living room.

As I was preparing dinner one afternoon, I glanced out my kitchen window and noticed three of our neighbors leave their homes at nearly the same time, making their way at various shuffling speeds to meet at the benches in the middle.

I'd seen them outside in the past, chatting over newly fetched mail or exchanging comments about the weather, but they had never stayed out for more than a few minutes as their aging bodies wouldn't cooperate with the demands of standing for so long. Now that we had benches, everything was different. Unable to resist the community, I went outside to check the mail and crossed the street to talk with them for a few moments. We spoke of children and grandchildren, aging siblings and friends, the weather. We enjoyed the breeze and waved at the occasional passing car. We lingered.

With dinner still cooking inside, I made my way back to the kitchen but kept my eye on them through my window. They stayed out for nearly an hour. I'd not seen them do that before. It wasn't that they didn't want to be together, but before it wasn't so easy. Now they had benches to sit on. And the benches made all the difference.

The benches didn't give them something to talk about. The benches weren't fancy, expensive, impressive, or flashy. They weren't a complicated solution to an unsolvable problem, and they didn't offer answers to difficult questions. The benches simply gave us neighbors a place to be, a place to rest, a place to come together on an ordinary day.

I've thought of this often in many areas of life when I try to make things too complicated. When I feel myself getting carried away, when I feel tempted to turn and build a city rather than accept my right-now home, I ask this simple question: *Where is the bench in this moment?*

In my work, when I see all the reasons why what they're doing over there is more important, impactful, and effective than what I'm doing over here, I'm tempted to make the platform wider and put brighter lights in the bulbs because I have

to dazzle, you know. I am determined to make my work the best, the most excellent. When I want to climb the ladder, what if instead I tore the ladder apart and used the wood to build a bench?

In my relationships, when I see a need I think needs fixing, a conversation I don't know how to tackle, a grief I have no words for, I'm tempted to make things complicated and fast-moving—let's pull out the city plans, build the roadways and sidewalks straight to your heart. But people don't need fancy and flashy, they probably just want regular. They don't need a fixer, they need a journeyer. They just need to sit on a bench with someone else so they know they're not alone. I know this because it's what I need too.

In my own soul, when I feel the need rise up in me for recognition, appreciation, and validation; when I feel my soul grasp and grope for worth, significance, a city to call my own, I want to look for the bench instead. *How can I sit down on the inside?*

A city is big and bright, loud and fast, important. A bench is small, quiet, and still with only enough room for a few.

Let's look beyond our first impressions of the bench as a place only for the players who aren't skilled enough to start, the second-string, the substitutes, the leftovers, the lazy, the overwhelmed, and the overlooked.

Let's explore city building and bench dwelling and be willing to allow the lights to go out in the city and see what we find above, around, and within us.

In our society, city lights are proof of life, progress, and growth; a sign of privilege, productivity, and opportunity. But when we bring all this to the inner life, the city lights we burn in our souls can begin to overpower the hidden life in Christ.

What happens when we are required to walk through darkness? What happens when we can't see our way? What happens when we don't know answers to our soul's deepest questions or the questions of those around us? The temptation is to start to build a city right there, a plan to find the answers, to fix the problem, to light the darkness once more.

But Christ himself is the light and any light I try to manufacture outside of him will be a false light at best. He has called me to a life of burden bearing and by-faith walking. Co-suffering, co-death, co-burial.

These are not the city way. These are the way of the lowly, the criminal, and the marginalized. But the mystery of Christ in you is that there, on the bench, God ushers you into his kingdom.

Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. (Rom. 6:3–5 NLT)

So what is this new life? It is relief that comes from learning to lean back into small-moment living rather than trying to keep pace with a fast-moving world.

When confronted with heartbreak, fear, questions, longing, frustrations, and grief, this new life means instead of running to build our cities of protection, we can set out on a different road. This road that may include loneliness, obscurity, hiddenness, and silence. It may be narrow, lined with danger, and filled with darkness at times. But we have a light that will not go out and cannot be turned off. The light of Christ burns bright within us, and wherever we go we will not go alone. This

is our promise, our protection, and the place where our voice comes from. When we turn our back on the city, we may find heartache—but we will also find something else.

We're headed down the new way of Christ, and all roads away from the city lead to the kingdom of God. The road to the kingdom is lined with invisible benches where the great work of love, service, listening, community, prayer, change, and transformation will occur.

Where to Look for the Kingdom of God

Everyone in my family was ready for church, already getting into our minivan. But I was running frantically through the house looking for my jacket. It wasn't in any of the normal places. I checked the top of the dresser, the floor beside my bed, the back of my office chair, and the dining room table. I nearly gave up and wore a different one, but on a crazy whim decided to check one last place—the closet.

There it was, hanging obediently in the one place it should have been, the one place it's supposed to actually be but rarely is because of my messy ways. And as I slipped on my jacket and ran out the door to join my family, I thought of how Jesus is often in the last place I want to look but the very place he always said he would be—in the whisper, in the children, in the small and secret places.

The kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the ground.

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

The kingdom of God is like a net.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.⁷

Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Luke 18:16)

Seeds, nets, yeast, a hidden treasure, a farmer, and a child—these are the clues to the kingdom. The road to the kingdom is available now; we walk on it every day even though we can't see it. God has set eternity in our hearts. We forget, but we know.

We don't have to fear this small way. We don't have to worry that embracing smallness will shrink our impact. Small was Jesus's whole life—how he came, how he lived, how he died, even to whom he revealed himself once he rose again.

Small is the position of my soul, the posture by which I approach others, God, and myself. When I'm small, I know I can't control opinions, manipulate outcomes, or force my agenda on others. When I'm small, I can move into the world confident as the person I most deeply am because I know I don't move into the world alone.

If this is true, then small is my new free.

But it won't always feel this way. Every day we are confronted with our own smallness. Those feelings of smallness come when we feel rejected, left out, afraid, overlooked. But they also show up when we stand at the edge of the ocean, on the top of a mountain or a building in the city, around the campfire with family.

We may make a distinction between the good kind of small and the bad kind of small, but the truth is there is no difference. In all our small ways, it is Christ who makes it possible for us to move through our lives, believing and trusting he is establishing his kingdom-sized purposes within and around us.

Small is our silent companion as we stand in a place of our own humiliation as well as in the midst of God's creation.

While humiliations may tempt us to build our own kingdoms, it's possible for us to let them prompt us to enter the kingdom of God, one inch above the ground. The same way Christ came small in Bethlehem, he continues to show up small within us, to establish his kingdom on earth.

It is my hope that when I'm finished writing this book (and you're finished reading it) we will hesitate to move so fast past those moments when we feel small and, instead, learn to sit with them. The same way the life of Christ was placed into the body of Mary, I want to discover how his life is being born within me. I want to practice seeing those small moments—both the ones that come from humiliation as well as those that are a result of creation—as secret entryways into the kingdom of God.

So where do we start our search for the kingdom of heaven? How do we discover our own benches and the benches we want to build for others? Let's begin on Tuesday, the smallest day of the week.

A Prayer for the Bench Dwellers

We confess our desire to light up our worlds with our own abilities, smarts, and accomplishments. May we have the courage to revisit our associations with the word *small*. May we be willing to change our minds about it, to decide to fold ourselves into it rather than run fast away. May we see our city plans for what they truly are—a steadfast dedication to ourselves. Instead, give us courage to sit on a bench and listen to the secrets small things have to teach us.