

Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, presents this collection of devotions in honor of our beloved pastor, Dr. Doug Dortch, upon his retirement as our senior minister 2011–2021, and in appreciation for his exemplary ministry during the COVID-19 crisis of 2020–2021.

HAVE A MINUTE?

Devotional Thoughts in a Season of Challenges

Doug Dortch

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Published in the United States by Nurturing Faith, Macon, GA.
Nurturing Faith is a book imprint of Good Faith Media (goodfaithmedia.org).
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-1-63528-157-6

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All scripture citations are from the New Revised International Version (NRSV)
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Dedication

To the members of the Mountain Brook Baptist Church, who have never ceased to astound me with their grace and generosity... Every crisis contains numerous opportunities, and every challenge affords us the chance to put our best foot forward. I am most proud of our church and our ministerial staff, who stepped forward to seize the moment and did so most faithfully for God's glory, not our own. You have "redeemed the times" (Eph. 5:16). Well done, good and faithful servants.

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Preface

March 15 is famously known as the Ides of March. That phrase come to us from Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, in which as he describes the impending assassination of the emperor, a random fortuneteller calls out to Caesar from among the crowd: "Beware the Ides of March" (Act 1, Scene 2, 15-19).

For us at Mountain Brook Baptist Church, March 15 marked a different kind of foreboding, one that began a season of shutdown in which, due to a raging virus, we found our rhythms and relationships suddenly interrupted. The threat of infection from the coronavirus, COVID-19, brought so much of life's activities, including gathered worship, to a screeching halt. Like Julius Caesar, we never saw such an interruption coming.

When it did, however, our church's ministerial staff quickly scrambled to determine how best to keep our church together during a shutdown whose duration we could not have predicted. Activities quickly shifted from in-person to online, and a host of digital content became posted to our church's various social media accounts as a way to maintain important connections. One of those digital initiatives was a daily devotion I began almost immediately, called "Have a Minute?" Its purpose was simply to offer a brief thought each weekday that might inspire and encourage participants to hold fast to their faith in a season where so much else seemed to be unraveling. Little did I imagine how much traction those devotions would get and how wide their reach would become.

As with many other digital offerings our church's ministerial staff produced, Mountain Brook Baptist Church extended its reach exponentially. What once was a congregation that based its ministries on attracting people to our physical location at the corner of Montevallo and Overbrook roads (just as did most other congregations in their contexts), Mountain Brook suddenly became a "light to the nations," literally speaking, as our witness went out to a much larger audience around the world.

This book is a collection of some of those daily devotions. The idea of compiling these offerings in written form came from a group of lay leaders in our church who thought these writings might benefit an even larger number of readers, looking for spiritual support long after COVID has gone (or until the next pandemic arrives). I am flattered and humbled that they would think these musings might have a "shelf life" long after they were first delivered.

In addition to expressing my appreciation to our church's lay leaders for this initiative, I also wish to thank David Hull and Susan Hull Walker and the William E. and Wylodine H. Hull Memorial Fund for providing the funds for this publication.

ADVENT

Walk in the Name of the LORD

Micah 4:5

*All the nations may walk in the name of their gods,
but we will walk in the name of the LORD GOD for ever and ever.*

In the days before COVID one of the more popular fund-raising activities was to organize a walk to promote attention to some important cause. Of course, if the cause was political, then you would call the walk a “march.” But “walk” or “march,” they’re essentially the same thing. If enough people can come together around a common cause and show their support to it, then maybe they can create a larger movement, one that might change the culture for the better.

I’m not against that form of free speech. It is, after all, one guaranteed in our Constitution’s Bill of Rights. But what if there might be a way that people of faith join together to create a movement in the direction of God, a movement that might make our world more of what God created it to be?

That’s the type of movement the prophet Micah was working toward in his prophecy. Micah, a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, envisioned a day when people from the surrounding nations would be streaming in God’s direction to learn of God’s ways and to walk in his paths. In preparation for that great day, what the prophets referred to as the “Day of the LORD,” Micah thought it important for people of faith to begin immediately to order their lives in anticipation of that good future. He saw it as a protest against the prevailing culture and a manifestation of the better way of life that living for God makes possible. In the fourth chapter, Micah says, “All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.”

It’s not hard to see how people today are chasing the wrong things and going in the wrong direction. They lack any sense of meaning or purpose to their lives. They’re walking after gods that cannot sustain them. But what difference might it make if they could see an example of someone who walks with God and, by doing so, adds so much to their life? What difference might it make if they could see that in you?

So, today, watch where you’re walking and pay attention to whom you’re following. If you find that you’re walking any path except the path of righteousness, change your direction before it’s too late. Only then will your future be one of favor and blessing, the sort of abundance God always makes possible for those who promote his cause and are careful to order their every step in his name.