

**MAYBE
TODAY**

THOUGHTS, PRAYERS AND SMILES

**WITH
TONY MILES**

CWR

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*For Frances, Hannah and Jonathan
– I am very proud of you all.
May you continue to grow in your Christian faith
with hope and love.*

*With thanksgiving to God for the lives of
Rob Frost, Donald English and Chris Bard:
three men of God, now in Glory, who have
significantly influenced my life, faith and ministry.*

*‘As long as you live, keep learning how to live.’
Seneca – Roman philosopher, dramatist, poet and statesman
(c. 4 BC – AD 65)*

‘Tony has the most fun-loving, faith-filled, fertile mind of anyone I know. I nick his ideas all the time and he doesn’t seem to mind a bit! I used to think “How on earth does he manage to stay so positive?” Now I’ve read this book I know.’

Andrew Graystone

Director, Churches’ Media Council

‘Stacked full of Tony’s profound insight and peppered with prayers, readings and a good dose of humour, *Maybe Today* is a call to pursue and live for God! A brilliant resource!’

Andy Frost

Director, Share Jesus International

‘Tony is a fantastic communicator. In this book he makes the Bible come to life with real relevance. It’s an easy read and a must read!’

Peter Kerridge

CEO, Premier Christian Radio

‘In broadcasting, preaching and writing Tony Miles has a great gift of communicating God’s love and truth in a clear and interesting way. In this gem of a book Tony’s thoughts and prayers are set alongside the wisdom of the ages to provide a great resource for everyday Christian living. A great read and a great gift to pass on!’

Martin Turner

Superintendent, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

‘This is not just another “daily reading book” ... but a maybe today book! Tony helps us to understand and smile at self-imposed pressures, and exchange them for a God-centred life lived in the knowledge of how much we are cherished by the Father.

Being in the process of “starting again” after Rob’s death my day-by-day prayer is: God’s place ... God’s work ... God’s relationships ... God’s timing ... God’s power ...’

Jacqui Frost

Director, Lantern Arts Centre

‘In our fast paced world comes a collection of devotions designed to make us stop, reflect, and find time to “peel the carrots”. No religious speak here – just an honest look at life, faith and love through the eyes of an honest man.’

Mike Rayson,

Australian Singer/Songwriter and Pastor, Nashville TN

‘Inspirational reflections! I love how real and down-to-earth they are ... who could believe some of the situations Tony has found himself in?! All written with a random humour that only the Reverend Miles possesses!

Lizzie Crow

Presenter, Premier Christian Radio

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FOREWORD

In one of the introductions to *Maybe Today*, Tony Miles draws our attention to the consequences of split-second decisions. Like many of us, I know what it means to decide quickly and then ponder on how my life might have been if I'd chosen another path. However, I think much less about how my split-second decisions affect others, especially the decisions that go unnoticed.

Yet there's something sobering about considering the impact of the insignificant, ongoing, minutiae of our daily lives. As we rush around, focusing on the big and important, what, or *who* do we overlook? How do we become more like God, in the detail, when our minds are on the big things?

This beautifully executed book provides a gentle daily nudge that encourages us to always examine our actions, in relation to the template laid out by God. But it doesn't bully us into doing so – in fact the title, *Maybe Today*, says it all. This book is pressure-free. Which is great news if, like me, you can feel guilty about not doing what you want to do, and guilt-ridden by what you do.

Some of the other devotionals – many brilliant – can unwittingly feed our guilt, especially for me the ones that are presented in date form. Just the dates themselves can feel like judgmental reminders of all the days I've missed, which is a sure-fire way of inspiring someone like me to give up!

Fortunately, this thoughtful, warm book has none of that. Tony truly understands what many of our lives look like, and so hasn't created unrealistic expectations in the following pages. Instead he's cleverly produced a book that's pragmatic about the challenges of modern life, whilst at the same time remaining utterly faithful to God.

The style of *Maybe Today* – a neat blend of humour and heart – captures the character of Tony Miles, which is passionately compassionate. It's in Tony's DNA to care about people, to have

a ridiculously naff sense of humour (Jonathan and Hannah I agree with you; your dad really is random), and above all to have a burning hunger to live more and more like God, coupled with an urgency to share this great God with others.

I highly commend Tony and I highly recommend *Maybe Today*. It reminds me of an Advent Crown stacked with goodies you want to devour in one go but know you'll get more benefit from savouring one succulent bite-size a day.

So if you're looking for a regular injection of spiritual nourishment in a practical, engaging and contemporary way then this is the book for you.

Oh by the way, just in case I've not made myself clear, I really love this book!

Diane Louise Jordan

TV presenter, author, corporate speaker and patron of many charities

PREFACE

BEFORE YOU READ THIS BOOK

A German proverb says, 'No honest man ever repented of his honesty.'

- *Are you perfect?* If so, there's no point in reading any further because you obviously won't need this book. Beware though! There's just the possibility that, because of your claim, you might not be as flawless as you think. So, just in case, try swallowing some pride and read on.
- *Are you intellectually superior?* If so, you might be better off grappling with a more weighty academic tome. You know the type of book. *Maybe Today* is not intended to be a work of systematic theology, but a random collection of devotional material.
- *Are you in total control and never harassed?* If so, what's it like? I admire you. Perhaps you could give *Maybe Today* to someone like me: a simple soul who wants to be like Jesus, but often feels terribly unworthy, struggling with what it means to be a Christian in practice in this stressful ever-changing world; someone who is utterly amazed that God transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary to further the work of His kingdom.
- *If you are none of the above, then read on!* However, don't get too excited, this is not a 'How To' book with all the answers on how to be holy. Rather, *Maybe Today* asks some questions and will hopefully help you to reflect, pray and smile too. I trust you will find God speaking to you as you turn these pages, just as I found the Holy Spirit whispering to me.

Jesus said, 'But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13a).

LIGHTEN UP

Is it just me? I worry that Christians take themselves far too seriously. It's a cliché, but Jesus wants us to be *born again*, not *bored again*. It's no wonder some people are put off Christianity when they look at the faces and lives of some of God's people. He loves us all, despite the fact that our lives are not always as attractive as they should be. The deep joy in some Christians seems to have sunk so deep that it can't be seen! I'm not advocating people adopt a fixed cheesy grin, or make false attempts to look joyful whatever happens. However, I dare to believe that life is for living. It's not a sin to have fun or enjoy being a disciple of Jesus – in spite of the inevitable tough times we face. May I give you permission to smile occasionally?

Someone said, 'It takes seventeen muscles to smile and forty-three muscles to frown.'

BEING HOLY

In contrast to Christians taking themselves too seriously, we don't always take God's grace, love and power seriously enough. *Maybe Today* is an attempt to connect with those, like myself, who have faith and good intentions, but often feel like giving up the pursuit of holiness. Why? Because we think we can never be like the great women and men of faith we admire so much. We would like to emulate them, but instead of allowing them to inspire us, we find ourselves becoming disheartened. We somehow don't think Jesus can make us something we're not. What's more, we can be put off by strange ideas of what *holiness* is. Here's some good news: This book is less about *you* and more about what *God* can do in and through you, starting not with the big things in your life, but the little decisions you make day by day.

The apostle Paul prayed, 'May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through ... The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it' (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24).

THANKS

I am indebted to those who have been a constant source of encouragement and practical help to me in my ministry, and especially in the writing of this book. A huge heartfelt thank you to the following:

- My ministerial colleagues at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, for their fellowship, wisdom and good humour: Rev Martin Turner, Rev Dr Malcolm White, Rev Gordon Newton, Sister Jane Middleton and 'Boy Wonder', Pastor Jonathan Green.
- My initial proof readers: Ollie McEwen, Nadia Moreira, Kaye Lee and John Robins. Not forgetting my good-humoured editor, Sue, and all at CWR.
- My friends and colleagues who have graciously written words of commendation to persuade you to read, especially the lovely Diane for her Foreword.
- My friends at The Nationwide Christian Trust, especially Ray George and Canon Michael Cole, for allowing me to adapt a few thoughts that were originally written for past editions of *Living Light*.
- My colleagues at Premier Christian Radio and our regular listeners.
- Most importantly, my family: especially my brother-in-law and prayer partner, John Izzard; my children, Hannah and Jonathan, for their patience; and my soul mate and constant supporter, Frances. x

OMISSIONS

I'm a 'magpie' and collect anything bright and shiny. Except where original, or specifically acknowledged, other information included in this anthology is believed to be common knowledge or its origin unknown.

The sources of this material are many and varied. Some illustrations, quotes and jokes have been noted after hearing people use them in conversations, sermons and other contexts – including emails, the internet and Christian publications (such as local church magazines).

I am grateful for this material and any omissions of acknowledgement will be gladly corrected publicly on my blog (www.mayb2day.org.uk) and in future editions of this book. Where there is need for clarification, material I have written has the initials TM.

I pray that you will be inspired, challenged and uplifted by these reflections. Read on and enjoy!

Tony Miles

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IF? (PART I)

Warning: Each reflection in this book will only take a few minutes to read. But (and there's always a 'but') my introductions will take a little longer to peruse. Yes, I said 'introductions'. Some preachers seem to have lots of false endings to their sermons and never know

when to stop! Well, you have the opposite here. If you can't be bothered to look at them, I'll forgive you. However, they will help you to understand the thinking behind the refrain that runs through these pages: 'Maybe today ...' I hope they will challenge you to allow Christ, by His Holy Spirit, to nurture holiness in your life.



Why is this book called Maybe Today?

I was watching the movie *Sliding Doors* starring Gwyneth Paltrow. Yes, I know it's peppered with bad language and has a few moments which might offend some, but I was challenged by the film's underlying message: in an instant, a person's life can be sent down one path instead of another. It raised for me the big 'What if?' question.

Sliding Doors is good value for money – two films in one! There are parallel storylines which commence as London publicist, Helen, dashes to catch a tube train. The movie explores what happens if a split second sends your life in two completely different directions. One story follows what happens after Helen fails to get on a tube train because a child blocks her way for a few seconds. The other depicts an entirely different chain of events. These come into play after Helen manages to enter the carriage having avoided the child and

grasped the train's sliding door before it closes.

I commute into London regularly, so I can identify with just getting on or narrowly missing a tube train. I was only a few minutes behind one of the trains torn apart by the 7/7 bombings in 2005. Why? Well, simply because I was running late. I could easily have been in one of the devastated carriages and it's one of life's mysteries why I escaped. I can only begin to imagine with horror how different things could have been. I have tremendous sympathy for those caught up in it all.

All this left me thinking. You and I make split-second decisions every day about all sorts of things. What's more, they can make a far reaching difference to our lives and the lives of others. Let me give some examples of how momentary happenings can be regrettable:

- The man who loses his temper and strikes out at another.
- The teenager who decides to follow a bad influence.
- The couple in a passionate moment who have unprotected sex.
- The businessman who decides to leave out something significant on his tax return.
- The shopper who puts something in a bag without paying.

And so I could go on (and usually do). Some of these illustrations are extreme and could have been far more ordinary, but still significant.

Sliding Doors led me to thinking about my Christian faith. If split seconds can make such a difference, do I take them seriously? There are so many things I don't have power over, like bumping into a child when running for a train. Nevertheless, others are very much within my control, like deciding whether to say sorry to the child with whom I've had the collision, or whether to work late or come home early to see my family. It's easy to think that growing in holiness is about the big choices I make in life. The more I observe the lives of Christians who are shining examples, the more I'm convinced that the little decisions people make each day are

equally important. Yet I often forget to pray about such things or sufficiently consider the implications of my hasty actions.

The late Rev Dr Rob Frost was known for the big and successful projects he'd launched and led, like the Share Jesus Missions, Easter People and countless other projects he took on tour nationally and internationally. He was an author and broadcaster, yet Rob was a good friend who cared, who released people's gifts, who encouraged, who prayed, who appreciated them, and who was there for them when they needed help or support.

Rob made positive decisions about the little things he considered important. Those who knew him well have valued and will remember these priorities. It's the Holy Spirit that helps us make the most of seemingly insignificant situations, so they become all-important. Hence, every opportunity is given for the light of Christ to shine through us – despite our faults. Often, God will work despite us and without our knowledge, but as we grow in faith we can make ourselves more available to be used by Him.

Questions:

- What will people say about you at your funeral?
- Are you happy with what you think people will say about you?
- When you meet Jesus face to face, what will He say about you?
- Are you concerned enough about that last question?

Now let us take a brief moment to remember God's love, grace and the forgiveness that's available through Christ ... before we get too depressed by these questions! Paul said, 'for *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...' (Romans 3:23, my italics). The good news is that, by trusting in what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we can know His forgiveness and help. This is a free gift, if only we'd receive it: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God ...' (Ephesians 2:8–9). I love Philip Yancey's book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* It's worth every penny. He writes, '*Grace means there is nothing we can do to make*

God love us more – no amount of spiritual calisthenics and reunifications, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries and divinity schools, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. *And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less* – no amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.¹¹

The trouble is, when I'm swept along by the pace of today's world, I doubt I'll ever become the man of God I should be. In his book *Get A Life*, Paul Valler writes, 'We may have a sense of what God is calling us to do, but be trapped by a self-image that is a barrier in the mind. That limiting self-image can be age, family background, past failures or comments people have made in the past (such as "You're no good", or "You'll never achieve anything"). God seems to specialize in using people who feel weak. "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:27).¹² Well, that's encouraging!

Nevertheless, when I'm busy and stressed, how can I make good decisions – when I'm full of a cocktail of goodness and evil? Paul captures something of this struggle: 'For what I do is not the good I want to do ... For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do' (Romans 7:19,15b). Some preachers are very good at telling us how we should behave as Christians, but they never help us unlock the power to do those things. They exhort us to try harder in our discipleship, but they don't tell us the all-important and essential factor. It's as though it's some sort of a secret! Stay tuned and I'll share the secret in Intro. Part 2. It's up next!

GETTING CAUGHT UP IN THE LIFE OF GOD (PART 2)

Are you ready for the secret? This is how we change our lives and become more like Jesus: Major W. Ian Thomas, the founder of Torchbearers – an international evangelistic organisation –

wrote about the mystery of godliness. He said, ‘The moment you come to realise that only God can make a man godly, you are left with no option but to find God, and to know God, and to let God be God in and through you, whoever He may be and this will leave you with no margin for picking and choosing for there is only one God, and He is absolute, and He made you expressly for Himself!’³

I passionately believe the secret to holiness is learning what it means to be ‘in Christ’ and for ‘Christ to be in us’. Paul writes, ‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but *Christ lives in me*. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20, my italics).

You and I only ‘fight the good fight’ and win the battle over apathy and temptation in our lives when we allow Jesus to work within us. He then guides us towards making positive and considered decisions in the face of everyday challenges.

The secret is inviting God to reside within us and to get caught up in a relationship with the Divine. This has been likened by some to a dance (*perichoresis* – Greek word for dance and a metaphor for the Trinity). Eugene H. Peterson, writer of *The Message*, wrote the following:

Imagine a folk dance, a round dance, with three partners in each set. The music starts up and the partners holding hands begin moving in a circle. On signal from the caller, they release hands, change partners, and weave in and out, swinging first one and then another. The tempo increases, the partners move more swiftly with and between and among one another, swinging and twirling, embracing and releasing, holding on and letting go. But there is no confusion, every movement is cleanly coordinated in precise rhythms (these are practiced and skillful dancers!), as each person maintains his or her own identity. To the onlooker, the movements are so swift it is impossible at times to distinguish one person

from another; the steps are so intricate that it is difficult to anticipate the actual configurations as they appear: *Perichoresis* (*peri* = around; *choresis* = dance).⁴

In order to prepare ourselves for the dance of God, it helps to:

- worship regularly.
- ensure that we pray about all things, however briefly.
- stop limiting prayer to particular circumstances, times and places.
- be in fellowship with other Christians, including those different from us, or with whom we disagree.
- feed ourselves spiritually – especially on God’s Word.

These things help to develop a relationship for dancing, which can set us free to be who we are to be in Jesus.

‘Christ in us’ may be the key, but it still isn’t easy when we’re up against it! It’s hard to make time to nurture a relationship in a pressurised digital society, when time’s at a premium:

We are constantly texting or talking on our mobiles, or keeping in touch with friends and strangers

whether it be MSN, or social networks, like Facebook.

Yet, we have no time for our Creator.

We fire off emails here, there and everywhere, with little thought, and we do the same with our prayers and our reading.

We find there’s little time to listen, which isn’t surprising for, as soon as there’s any silence, we put on our iPods, radios, or TVs.

We know more about the global village we live in and what everyone thinks, but we’re frightened to find out too much about ourselves

and the difference we can make to the world.

We let our lives be taken over by uncontrolled ‘To Do Lists’ which are dictated by others, or even by our own need to be wanted and valued.

We work long hours to earn more to pay the rent or a mortgage for a property we’re rarely able to relax in, because we are too busy working to pay for the roof over our heads.

We spend a lot of our cash on so called ‘labour saving’ devices,
 but we don’t seem to have any more time.
 We travel more than ever in cars, buses,
 trains, aircraft and boats,
 because we are able to do so.
 Yet, we don’t think a lot about
 our spiritual journey through life;
 we’re always doing, but never being;
 we are missing
 the
 point
 !

The next time you’re reading the Gospel according to John, notice that he presents us with plenty of contrasts and choices: light/darkness, truth/falsehood, life/death, sight/blindness, good/evil, shepherd/wolf, love/hate, day/night, faith/doubt and so on.

Maybe today is the day to start choosing! But before we do anything, remember again it starts with Jesus, who said, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other’ (John 15:16–17). Once we know that we’ve been chosen by His grace, we then live in love guided by the Spirit of Christ who helps us to choose wisely: ‘This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ...’ (Deuteronomy 30:19).

But, what is holiness?

The only way for us to grow in holiness is to surrender ourselves more and more to God through Jesus. We long to please Him and He inspires us to travel the right way, rather than presenting us with rules we must follow. His heart becomes our heart.

Saviour from sin, I wait to prove
That Jesus is thy healing name;
To lose, when perfected in love,
Whate'er I have, or can, or am.
I stay me on thy faithful word:
The servant shall be as his Lord.

Answer that gracious end in me
For which thy precious life was given;
Redeem from all iniquity,
Restore, and make me meet for heaven:
Unless thou purge my every stain,
Thy suffering and my faith are vain.

Didst thou not die that I might live
No longer to myself, but thee,
Might body, soul, and spirit give
To him who gave himself for me?
Come then, my Master and my God,
Take the dear purchase of thy blood.

Thine own devoted servant claim
For thine own truth and mercy's sake;
Hallow in me thy glorious name;
Me for thine own this moment take,
And change, and throughly purify;
Thine only may I live and die.

Charles Wesley – hymn-writer, poet, evangelist and co-founder of the Methodist movement with his brother, John (1707–1788)

SMILE

'Holiness consists of doing the will of God with a smile.'

Mother Teresa of Calcutta – Albanian Roman Catholic nun (1910–1997) as quoted by Billy Graham in The Secret of Happiness

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, my Saviour and Friend,
 may Your Holy Spirit permeate every part of my being.
 Cleanse and heal me, revive and renew me,
 Equip and enable me, strengthen and empower me,
 that I may live for You and be set apart for You.
 May my words and actions bear witness to Your love
 and may I be set free to obtain life in all its fullness,
 with the hope of eternal glory in my heart,
 for Your kingdom's sake. Amen.*

THERE'S ORDER IN 'RANDOM' (PART 3)

This is the last bit of my introduction – honest! It only needs to be read if you're likely to be puzzled by such an *ad hoc* collection of thoughts.

'Dad, you're so *random*!' My teenage children, Hannah and Jonathan, are never backward in coming forward, especially when it comes to telling their dad what they think of him. I suppose sometimes my observations, quips and humour can be arbitrary and unpredictable. Hannah and Jonathan just think I'm 'mad', 'crazy', or 'bonkers' – and sometimes all three. But, they would. Little do they know that they have *random* moments too – perhaps that's one of the reasons I love them so much! I guess as we grow to understand each other more, we'll realise that we're not quite so *random* after all. There are patterns to our behaviour and often reasons for the way we behave which reflect our characters, past experiences, knowledge and other influences.

Why do I mention this? Okay it is pretty *random* in itself, but I guess it's because I've come to appreciate that the God I worship is often mysterious and not as predictable as people would like to think. The kingdom of God is often more messy than I, by nature, feel comfortable with. As a methodical Methodist, I like things to be planned, ordered and consistent. Yet, it's what I call 'divine randomness' that stops me being complacent and

keeps me on my spiritual toes. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm sure that God is dependable and reliable in His nature and there are good reasons for His mysterious and surprising behaviour. Nevertheless, I have to accept that there are some things, such as healing, I'll never fully understand this side of heaven.

Let me simply point out that whilst Christians believe that their Creator brings order out of chaos and is consistent in love, people will never completely fathom the depth of His being or the extent of His grace this side of Glory. His Holy Spirit is likened to a wind that blows where it pleases (John 3:8). I'm praying that the wind of the Holy Spirit will use this random collection of thoughts in this book and apply them appropriately to your heart.

The Pharisees were passionately devout, yet their confident, systematic (albeit selective) theology missed out on what God was doing by the Holy Spirit. Why? Because Jesus' ministry must have appeared *random* and radical. In short, our Maker and Sustainer may not be as *random* as we tend to think at first. The deeper our relationship with the Trinity, the more we should glimpse God's nature, trust His will, be open to surprises, and make way for a bit of disorder in our lives. Thankfully, God is ever-patient, understands us completely and believes in us.

In a nutshell, I want you to see each day as an opportunity to ponder the '*Maybe today*' question. Let God help you to choose wisely and to make decisions that can enable you to grow in holiness and be an effective Christian witness. It's about learning to listen and be reflective – even when you're in a hurry; it's about asking the right questions and allowing Christ within to prompt you, rather than spending hours agonising over what's right or wrong; it's about pondering '*what if?*' rather than regretfully finding yourself tormented by '*if only*' after you've paid insufficient attention to the decisions you make.

Maybe today, we need to learn to be open to surprises, spontaneous in love and ready to be caught up in the dance of God's kingdom!