

“Something inside us longs to be God-like. To be fully freed and self-defining is the existence we ‘post-everything’ people are reaching for. But our pursuit is exhausting. What if we admit that God alone is God-like? What if we accept the good limitations of how he created us? That’s what *Faithfully Present* helps us to see, as Adam Ramsey guides us into those green pastures and beside those still waters.”

**Ray Ortlund**, President, Renewal Ministries

“In *Faithfully Present*, Adam Ramsey ranges far and wide across time and space: from the apparently insignificant minutiae of our lives to the sweeping realities of the new heavens and the new earth. The pulsing challenge at the heart of the book is to find our contentment and satisfaction not in ourselves (whether our activity or achievements or even relationships) but in our God: Father, Son and Spirit. This is a book to make us stop and think, which, for all of us, is an increasingly pressing need.”

**Gary Millar**, Principal, Queensland Theological College, Australia;  
Author, *Read This First: A Simple Guide to Getting the Most from the Bible*

“In a world that constantly tells us we can be anything we want to be and to go harder, to run faster and to do more, Adam Ramsey warmly points us back to what’s true: we are creatures limited by both time and place. And our limitations are for our good. Adam’s words graciously correct our drive to identify with our productivity and to be everywhere all at once. But he doesn’t stop there. He invites us to consider how our given limitations set us free to be faithfully present right when and where our good God has placed us. I closed this book with a renewed affection for my family and friends, my faith and my work, the season I’m in, the place I live, the body I’ve been given, and the heaven that awaits me. This book is full of worshipful words for a weary generation.”

**Jen Oshman**, Author, *Enough about Me; Cultural Counterfeits;*  
and *Welcome*

“In *Faithfully Present*, Adam Ramsey proves to be a reliable, insightful, and frequently playful guide who helps us navigate the changing seasons of our lives. This book is a heartfelt magnification of the unchanging God, who is faithful and with us through them all.”

**Jared C. Wilson**, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and  
Author-in-Residence, Midwestern Seminary; Author, *Love Me Anyway*

“*Faithfully Present* is a refreshing tonic for the soul wearied by our culture’s call to do more, be more and achieve more. Beautifully written and packed with theological riches, it is an invitation to receive the limits of time and place as gracious gifts from an infinitely wise and loving Father. Adam shows how embracing these limits is the pathway to greater peace and deeper joy. His call to slow down and live fully present is desperately needed and delightfully liberating.”

**Carolyn Lacey**, Author, *Extraordinary Hospitality*  
(for *Ordinary People*) and *Say the Right Thing*

“Adam has given us a lovely meditation on time, bracing reflections on death, and important insights on place. With many turns of phrase, astute observations, and theological gems, *Faithfully Present* beckons us into true living. I am grateful to have read it, and I hope to live better because of it.”

**Jonathan K. Dodson**, Author, *Our Good Crisis* and *The Unwavering Pastor*

“You cannot make time to read this wonderfully pastoral and theologically rich book. But that’s the point. We cannot make time; only God can. In our hurried, harried and distracted world, Adam Ramsey offers us a glimpse into a life lived faithfully and present-ly before God. With typical pastoral insight, Adam presents us with a picture of what an embodied, time-honouring, eternity-focused, faithfully present life looks like. And it looks like Jesus! As Adam shows, rather than us becoming frustrated, angry or despairing by our lack of time or the presence of our limits, we have a God who calls us to bring those lacks and limits to him, and who enables us to live faithfully present lives as we wait for time to end and eternity to begin. Take the time to read it!”

**Stephen McAlpine**, Director for Cultural Engagement, City to City  
Australia; Author, *Being the Bad Guys*

“So many people are captivated by answering one important identity question: ‘Who am I?’ While that is an important question, it can’t be fully answered without also knowing when you are and where you are. In *Faithfully Present*, Adam Ramsey reminds us of our humanity and our limits. Embracing our humanity helps us embrace our limitless God. I hope this book gets a wide reading.”

**J.T. English**, Lead Pastor, Story Line Church, Arvada,  
Colorado; Author, *Deep Discipleship*

“Adam Ramsey is quickly becoming one of my favorite authors. After writing deeply and beautifully about the collision of head and heart in *Truth on Fire*, he turns his biblically saturated imagination to a topic we are in desperate need of understanding in our technological age: the truth of limits and how embracing them settles our soul into the present, where we can commune deeply with God and others. In fact the only place where we can do that is in the present. If you feel hurried and thin, or if you feel like your mind is never with you in the room... this is the book for you!”

**Matt Chandler**, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Flower Mound, Texas

“Adam has blessed us with such a gift in this book. *Faithfully Present* is beautifully written and deeply convicting, yet packed with hope and joy. Don't rush it. Don't skim it. Take your time and sit with it. Engage with these pages at the heart level...and watch what God does in your life through it.”

**Dai Hankey**, Founder, Red Community; Author, *Hopeward:  
Gospel Grace for Weary Souls*

*To my dad, Brad Ramsey—  
for embodying in the lives of your own sons  
what you never quite received as a son yourself:  
the faithful presence of a good father.  
I love you and honour you.  
Thank you.*

# Faithfully Present



**Adam Ramsey**

the good book  
COMPANY

Faithfully Present  
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# Foreword

*by Alex Early*

**A**re you here? I don't mean are you breathing, holding a book in your hand and reading words. I mean does your life whisper, "I'm absent" or shout from deep within your belly, "I am here! Really here! Fully alive to this moment"? In the final moments of your life, will you be saddened because you missed the point or filled with gratitude because you chose to forgo the petty for the sake of the true, good, meaningful, beautiful and, ultimately, eternal? A distracted life is a kind of death before death. A present life is life before Life.

What you're holding is an unusual book of wisdom. And as you've likely learned throughout the course of your life, wisdom is anything but trite, common or easy to come by. Rather, it is almost always forged through shivering winters of pain and scorching summers of heartache.

In 2015, I was working as hard as I could, doing absolutely everything that I believed God had called and equipped me to do. I was surrounded by men and women who affirmed me and cheered me on. I felt like my vision was clear, and I was basking in the sheer favor of the Lord. My first book, *The Reckless Love of God*, was set to release and I was preaching at

conferences, developing leaders, and nearing the completion of my doctoral studies. All of my heroes had become my friends. By all accounts, I was thriving—until one Friday afternoon in April, when the sky went black and everything came crashing down.

I walked into my house to learn that my wife of eleven years, who had loved, supported and cherished me, was all but done with faith and church, and even with us. I was more than surprised. I was shocked, crushed, devastated. How? How had I reached the point where the person to whom I'd pledged my very life was suddenly saying these things—and I hadn't seen it coming? Here's how: I deceived myself though "successful" ministry. I mistook large crowds for fruitfulness. I mistook caffeine for the Holy Spirit. I was more interested in being used by God than known by him. I had the veneer of presence but was actually absent. I was in a daydream. Ambition that is fueled, tamed and tempered by the Holy Spirit will lead to a life that honors God, yourself and others. Ambition that is rooted in childhood wounds, the need to be liked and crooked pride is a death grip.

My wife, Jana, and I went on a ministry hiatus for over a year. We submitted ourselves to godly counsel, professional therapy and countless hours of solitude and prayer. We had no idea what shape our lives would take. We discovered that the words the prophet Isaiah spoke about Jesus himself would become true in our own experience of him so many centuries later: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3, NIV). We learned countless lessons through that season of life, giving us what we call around our house the "Early Code". It's our simple mantra, which roots us in a life of faithful presence.

First, all of our wealth is in our relationships. Our relationships with Jesus, each other, our kids and our friends are what is of highest value in our lives. Not our income,

square footage, education or whatever else we might be tempted to believe brings true wealth.

Second, Jesus is gentle. Have you met someone who knows how to slow down and spend time with Jesus? Have you ever thought to ask that person, “Well, what’s he like?” Here’s what I’ve found: people who know Jesus personally tend to describe him in terms of his gentleness, kindness, compassion and patience. I almost never hear words like “Well, he’s Lord, King and Christ”. Those things are the obvious titles that Jesus deserves. After all, he did rise from the dead. Yet, at the same time, those who walk closely with him know him as gentle. He said as much about himself (Matthew 11:29).

Third, we aim to live and die in a state of gratitude. Entitlement kills everything, especially relationships and creativity. Remaining in a place of gratitude causes joy to increase as we are set free by the simple words, “Thank you”. A life of faithful presence is a thank-you note to God and the world around you.

You will find each of these principles woven throughout *Faithfully Present*. Adam has joined the off-key band of those of us who live our lives upside down, exchanging ambition for faithfulness, being present to where and when we are, rooted in what Jesus describes as abundance (John 10:10). Having known Adam for many years, I can honestly say that this man and his family strive to embody what’s written on these pages.

*Under the Kindness,*

**ALEX EARLY**

Pastor, Redemption Church Seattle



## INTRODUCTION

# Learning to Live Where You Are

*“We live the given life, not the planned.”*

**WENDELL BERRY**

**W**here and when are you? Come with me on a quick mental field trip through your present time and place.

Where in the world are you sitting right now to read these words? Try to picture your exact location on the globe. Then zoom in: name the town or city you are in. Consider the geographic makeup of how the land rises and falls and how the various bodies of water punctuate and define the surrounding land. Now consider the people who live in that place with you and the countless individual stories that have all woven together to create a shared sense of history and culture in that place.

The more you think about it, the more astounding that place becomes. Yet that place—with its name and geography and quirks and story—is merely one place among 4.3 million unique towns and places on this planet.<sup>1</sup> And we haven't even begun to consider how this blue orb of water and rock, bearing the miraculously precise conditions necessary to sustain life, is at this very moment hurtling at the speed of 110,000 km per hour through space around the sun, while spinning like a basketball on a giant invisible finger at the leisurely pace of approximately 1,600 km per hour.

And somehow, there you sit. Reading a book. Not freaking out about that. Have you really given thought to *where you are*?

Next question: when are you?

Look outside and note the colour of the trees and the patterns of the weather and what that tells you about the season you are in. Name the present year, as recorded by the number of solar laps we've done since the incarnation of Jesus Christ split time in two. Think about the times that have led up to this exact moment in your life. What decade were you born in? What were the fashion trends, music and global events that we now identify with *that* decade? Now try, if you can, to visualise the events from January 1st, 1900 to December 31st, 1999...

The complexity is staggering.

And yet, that century, so filled with world-shaping events and technological advancements, ticked by one minute at a time. Just like our present one is. Zoom in back to this present moment. Look at the watch on your wrist or the clock on your nearest device and take note of the time.

Wherever you are, that place is to you, *here*.

Whenever you are, that time is to you, *now*.

## **MAKING PEACE WITH OUR HUMANITY**

The reality of our time and place is at once blindingly obvious and yet at the same time hardly noticed by us. And yet, isn't it true that the *here* and *now* of where God has us is so frequently the very thing that frustrates us? *Here* and *now* locates us. And that's fine—so long as our present moment is beautiful and fun and untarnished by trouble. But the moment that the vibrant beauty of our highlights in time and place becomes ordinary again, when our present moment is intruded upon by difficulty, when we find our days blurring into one another as we busily rush from one thing to the next—just trying to keep up, living but hardly feeling *alive*—our locatedness feels

like a burden to be unloaded. We attempt to escape from and transcend our *here* and *now*, longing for some other *there* and *then*. Our limits become a binding to be stretched, as we seek to fit in *just a little bit more*. And the 21st century provides us with all sorts of technological innovations that promise to enable us to do just that.

Yet here's what I think a lot of us have begun to suspect, deep down, perhaps in sacred moments of clarity, after we surface from the social media fog of our phones: *the need to transcend time and place ruins us for our own time and place*. If we constantly have our minds set on the next thing or another place, we miss the life God has actually given us, even as we keep existing our way through it. On the flip side, it is when we embrace our God-given limitations, being faithfully present to what God desires to do in us and through us, that we become most truly alive. It is when we recognise our humanity—our finite creatureliness—that we feel most truly ourselves.

After all, when good parents place limitations on their children, it's because they love them. And God is a very good Father. His limitations lead to life. As author Zack Eswine reminds us, it was the rejection of God's limitations that broke the world back in Genesis 3, when the hands of the first people stretched out to grasp what should have rightly remained beyond their reach: "'Unlimit me ... for God's glory in my generation!' we might say. But when 'unlimit me' becomes our prayer, we are not the first to pray it. A desire like 'unlimit me, now!' ruined Eden in the first place and bid Jesus to come and die for us."<sup>2</sup> Is it any wonder that every attempt by humanity to play God actually dehumanises us?

So many of our problems, fears, frustrations and anxieties are the result of trying to rid ourselves of what Jesus gladly took upon himself: *humanity*. Far from being a problem to be solved or an obstacle to be overcome, humanity is the very thing that the Lord Jesus entered into when he came into this world:

*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

While it's true (as we'll see) that you really are much smaller and more limited than it is comfortable to admit out loud, you are, yet, most wondrously *here*. God has placed you where you are, and when you are, for his glory, right now. What if you made peace with that?

Both your joy and your longevity lie in embracing a life that loudly declares, "I am not God". That confession—and the freedom it brings—is the goal of this book.

My hope through these pages is to help you think deeply and biblically and honestly about the genuine limitations of time and place that mark your creatureliness. To poke you with the right words so that you will step back and give weight to the limited number of sunsets and sabbath days you will receive and the limited number of places you can inhabit, and for you to make peace with your "not-Godness" in both of those realities.

I want you to have your eyes open to *here* and *now* in the ever-changing seasons and spaces of your life. To glorify God right where you are, not where you think you ought to be. To be present to the life that you *do* have, not the life you think you *should* have. As the poet-farmer Wendell Berry reminded us right at the beginning of this chapter, "We live the given life, and not the planned".<sup>3</sup> When we learn to master our ambitions, rather than being mastered by them, we find ourselves discovering, alongside the apostle Paul, the secret superpower of *contentment*.

*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances  
I find myself. I know how to make do with little, and  
I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all  
circumstances I have learned **the secret of being content***



... *I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:11-13, CSB, emphasis added)

What powered Paul onwards was knowing that the risen Jesus was ever near and ever strong. Because he was convinced that “the Lord is near” (v 5, CSB), he was “invincibilised” with contentment. That’s what we’re aiming for.

### **MOVING FORWARD BY STAYING PRESENT**

In the chapters that follow, we are going to explore how the Scriptures speak to two powerful realities that limit us and locate us: time and space—the “whens” and the “wheres” of our current existence. What I am arguing for can really be summarised in the two-word phrase coined by the American scholar James Davison Hunter: *faithful presence*. Here’s how Hunter defines this concept:

At root, a theology of faithful presence begins with an acknowledgement of God’s faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return. This is the foundation, the logic, the paradigm ... Only by being fully present to God as a worshipping community and as adoring followers can we be faithfully present in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the more our lives are oriented by the faithful presence of God to us, we too will become attentive and present to one another.

Isn’t that—life with God that we are fully alive to—what we most want to know? A life in which success is measured less by numerical data and more by relational flourishing—vertically with God and horizontally with others. Where churches seek to be, as my friend Alex Early describes it, “a community of people who are faithfully present to God, self, and others”.<sup>5</sup>

The first part of this book will outline various aspects of time, along with biblical reflections on what faithfulness to God looks like in those times. How do we live faithfully when life keeps changing? When life moves slowly? When life is coming at us fast? When life comes to an end?

The second part of the book focuses on the different spaces and places that *locate* us. God has given you one body, which can live in one place at a time, with a web of relationships to other people around you in that place. And in Christ, you are on your way home—heaven-bound—even as the kingdom of heaven gradually yet inevitably breaks into this world.

And that is where we will end: staring at the staggering reality of what is coming our way in the new creation, when earth and heaven become one place. There is indeed coming a moment in our definite future when time as we know it will be unlimited and place as we experience it will be uncursed. The limits will be lifted as we enter into fullness of life, unpunctuated by death, forever with God.

But here and now, we are to live each of our present days in light of the “eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17) that is in our future. And as we do, we learn to remember that each of the spaces we inhabit, and the times in which we do so, come to us from the hand of God. What would this coming week look like—all the gloriously ordinary parts of it you have planned for, along with some of the predictably unpredictable parts that no one can plan for—if you were to receive it, moment by moment, attentive to God’s presence and God’s purposes throughout it? The 2nd-century church father Irenaeus famously wrote, “The glory of God is man fully alive”.<sup>6</sup> That’s what every one of us wants down at the core of who we are: to be faithfully present and fully alive to God, right here and right now, with every part of our lives.