CULTIVATING A SEASON OF HOPE AND SIMPLE JOY

WAITING ON HOPE

BY MISSY JEANNE O'MALLEY

ISAIAH 40:3-5

A voice of one calling:

"In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."





START HERE

The word Advent actually means "coming" in Latin. It is the period of four Sundays and weeks before Christmas (or sometimes done from December first to Christmas Day!) During Advent we remember what it was like to wait for Jesus advent on earth, Christmas.

This is not meant to be a burden or an addition- there are so many things already in this season-but, in this current year of waiting, wondering, and weariness, it might be helpful to learn to be present and document the sweetness that this season may bring.

Included in the coming weeks:

- Scripture (to meditate or memorize)
- Devotionals (5 days per week)
- Activities *4-5 per week
- Baking Day 4 *set for a weekend days
- Instructional Guide for Documenting the Season in Photographs
- A Daily Photo Prompt



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley



DAYS OF DECEMBER

Photo prompts to capture this season. Use Hashtag #prov_daysofdecember

1. Light
2.Smiles
3. Hands
4.Tree
5. Family
6.Peace
7.Cozy
8.Hot Drinks
9. Cookies
10.Reflections
11. Twinkling
12. Favorites

13. Laughter

14. Sharing
15. Smiles
16. Tradition
17. Hope
18. Joy
19. Silence
20. Rest
21. Preparation
22. Togetherness
23. Warm
24. Silent Night
25. Celebration

THE SUPPLIES

WEEK ONE

-dirt

- -paperwhites bulbs *Home Depot/Lowes/Target -planter
- -pine cone

-twine

- -nut butter
- -nuts and seeds
- -gathered natural materials (sticks, rocks, etc)

-popcorn

-cranberries

Gingerbread Cookies Recipe (included)

WEEK TWO

- -hot chocolate mix
- -whip cream
- -oranges
- -whole cloves
- -items to fill for blessing bag (tissues, sanitizer,

socks, snacks, etc)

- -a little bit of spare time for a drive
- -Marshmallow Recipe (included)

WEEK THREE

-bell jar

-clear glue

-glitter

-water

-trinket or small item

-branches

- -white paper
- -applesauce

-cinnamon

-Cinnamon Bun Recipe (included)

WEEK FOUR

- -card making supplies
- -candles
- -tea
- -wrapping paper
- -White Chocolate Peppermint Hearts Recipe (included)



MONDAY 11/29



WAITING WITH HOPE

Being patient in waiting is not the same thing as being indifferent. I think sometimes we confuse the two. Patience is usually a quality of someone who is incredibly strong and able to sustain a deep desire without giving up.

Psalm 130:5 I wait for the Lord, My soul waits, And in his word I put my hope.

I believe the opposite to waiting with hope is waiting with "what-ifs".

Not being in control is part of the human condition. And frankly, it isn't something any of us do quite well. In fact, the less we know or understand the more our body and brain try to piece together possibilities that might lay ahead for us. It's that good old, fight, flight or freeze response. You innately are bracing yourself for what is next. It can lead to stress and anxiety, it can cause emotional and physical pain.

Waiting with God is where we can learn how to have joy when things aren't going the way we thought they would. We can sit with reality not being the way we want, we can let go of expectations and receive what God has in store for us (trusting him in the process).

Waiting can make you bitter, resentful and angry or it can produce self control and a hope for the future.

If it is true that God in Jesus Christ is waiting for our response to divine love, then we can discover a whole new perspective on how to wait in life. We can learn to be obedient people who do not always try to go back to the action but recognize the fulfillment of our deepest humanity in passion, in waiting. - Henri Nouwen

More recently I have been thinking about Abraham...quite a lot actually. Because when I realized it, it kind of sat with me. Abraham was promised a family and land. He died (full of faith and hope) with one son and as a sojourner.... A nomad. But he was written right down into that beautiful chapter on faith, assured of what he hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

I looked it up... it was approximately 1,767 years from Abraham to Jesus, almost 18 centuries. The Jewish people endured so much during that time. And there were still the faithful few who held out hope that the prophets were right, and a Messiah was coming.

Waiting is not just something that we have to endure until we get what we want, or what we were expecting. Waiting is the process of becoming who God wants us to be, and learning to trust in his goodness and timing.

TUESDAY 11/30



HOPE IN SILENCE

I tried to imagine what it might have felt like to be the Jewish people right before the Messiah came on the scene. Hundreds of years had passed, each generation thinking "now." It has to be now?! "You are coming, right?" But as more and more time passed, they gave up. Others around them had become spiritually indifferent and apathetic. People had all but forgotten. They walked away from their faith, they had stopped tithing, they stopped listening.

He still remained faithful though.

The Lord remained faithful as the culture changed. He remained faithful as the Jews adopted a new language and new customs.

A small group rose up to resist the influence of the culture. They drove the foreigners out of the temple. They rededicated it to the Lord, but when it came time to light the Menorah, well you know what happened right? The miracle of that small jar of oil lasting eight whole nights. God had a plan. The world was readying for the coming of The Rescuer.

When we sit in silence there is doubt. And there has been plenty of silence this year. Some welcome and some not so much. In the middle of a pandemic (something we couldn't have even imagined happening in our lifetime) there have been long periods of silence. When my children ask me when will this be over, I cannot answer. The longer it goes on, the more I wonder if God will show up. If there is some great miracle waiting on the horizon that we don't know about yet. But we have something that the old testament Jews did not. We ultimately know the end of the story. The rescuer has already come!

I struggle with writing that, it seems trivial in some ways, the way Christians wrap it all up in a simple bow. "And so we can trust Him. Have faith! The end."

But the truth is when I sit in the middle of the unknown... a hurting marriage, a child's diagnosis, a financial burden.... a worldwide "unknown". It really is the thing that gives me the most comfort. At the end of the day, I need someone who understands, who's ways are higher, who reminds me with personal touches that he sees me and he's got this.

When I was about 4 years old, I accidentally ran ahead of my mom and into an elevator. (Stay with me here.) As the doors shut, separating me from her she yelled, "Melissa! Remember your verse!" I had just memorized the kids version of Genesis 28:15. "I am with you and will keep you in ALL places." Enough comfort for a little girl's mind that she was not alone.

The full verse reads this:

Genesis 28:15

I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Be comforted in the silence, he is working. He will show up! Just like he did after 400 years, and in a way no one expected.

WEDNESDAY 12/1



HOPE IN SUFFERING

Does it sometimes seem that while others move ahead, you feel like you are moving further behind. That for whatever reason, (I'm reminded of Billy from The Polar Express.) "It just doesn't work out for me." There's just some season, or even some lives that seem to live a little closer to suffering. Not by any fault of their own. (And not that people who have made mistakes should be made to suffer). There's just some things we don't know why God allows in our lives.

Even the Psalmists asked "How long, Oh Lord?" And if I can be honest, these long periods of suffering or silence, put us at risk of giving up our faith. The misconception is that we will someday, somehow understand why?

Back to the need for humans to wrap it all up in a neat little package, something palatable. But God doesn't promise us that we won't suffer. In fact he tells us we will! But he also promised to be with us in the midst of it.

Unanswered prayers, grief, loss, struggle all things meant to tear us away from the hands of the one who can bring comfort.

We fight to believe that there might be a purpose that we cannot possibly understand. But I don't believe that the answer to "why?" actually is what we want or even need.

For the longest time in my life I have read Matthew 11:28 "and I will give you rest." as a release or relief from whatever the burden is...Oswald Chamber writes in his own words about Matthew 11:28 and it changed everything. "I will penetrate you with the spirit of life and you will be SUSTAINED." Psalms 54:4 says "The Lord is my helper SUSTAINER of my soul."

In the middle of suffering it's hard to see straight but while we aren't promised release we ARE promised peace.

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what

Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

THURSDAY 12/2



PRAYING WITH HOPE

Truthfully I found myself struggling to write this section. First with how I felt about prayer, and what I believed about prayer and then with actually getting it down on paper. My whole computer universe went bazerk. The only thing I can think is that this must be pretty important. Or I wouldn't be being met with such resistance.

My understanding of prayer was always that God needed to hear my ask. You know, like when your parents said "Try again. Ask the right way." (I know, fantastic perspective of God right?) But I am realizing that prayer is not so much "asking the right way" but a posturing to be able to receive. See, until we realize that we have a need or a desire that is going unfulfilled, it's not till that point that we are in a place where "we are at the limit of our desperation" (Oswald Chambers), and we finally ask.

To be able to receive, you need to be in a relationship with the Giver. You need to be in a place where you realize that...

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Whatever you lack, emotionally, spiritually, physically, these things all come straight from the source.

The author of Ephesians (3) wrote,

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

The "for this reason" he was talking about Jesus!

The verse before this says, "...According to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him." We are encouraged to pray boldly! We have access to God because of Jesus fulfilling his eternal purpose.

I know in my personal walk with the Lord, the most desperate groans are when I know I am at the end of myself and that it is only by relying on Him that I feel any comfort or peace in the situation (even when it goes seemingly unanswered or is not what I would have planned).



Just because prayer doesn't bend to your will doesn't meant it is not necessary and fruitful and life changing. In fact, I believe most of the time it may not bend to my will, but it does bend my will to whatever God has ahead for me.

Take a minute and reflect on this Prayer: A time to be still A chance to see God work A acknowledgment of God's sovereignty A catalyst for heart change

Thank God for Jesus who tore the curtain and gave us full access to God and his glorious unlimited resources. To answer, to sustain, to comfort and to rescue!

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus came that day in Bethlehem so that one day we would have full access to the Father. He wants us to be able to approach the "throne of grace" with confidence.

FRIDAY 12/3



HOPE IN THE UNEXPECTED

2 Corinthians 4:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.

Let's talk about the inverse of what "hoping in the unexpected" means. Maybe it means becoming complacent. Maybe it means looking at life at face value, and forgetting that there is so much more at work beneath the surface.

We lose touch with our experiences in an effort to be productive or purposeful.

Slowing down to be able to see and receive the unexpected presence of God in your life is a discipline and skill that needs to be nurtured and grown. A person who is looking for God's presence knows that "bidden or unbidden God is present".

I remember in my teen years working at a camp. The mountain top experiences of life, really were on a mountain top in that season of my youth. One of the things I remember most distinctly about that time is being surrounded by other people who loved the Lord, and being surrounded by nature. It made God seem to be more present to me. When really, I just became more in tune with "looking for God moments" in my life.

As I got older and feared more what people thought about my life and my faith, I put down that practice. Afraid of seeming off the wall or weird, I just stopped.

I stopped mentioning moments that I thought were poignant and "God filled".

I stopped giving him credit for the unexpected blessing or the peace that came from seemingly nowhere when things were going wrong.

I stopped seeing my friends as His presence in my life, and stopped telling people when I was thinking about them, or praying for them, or that God laid them on my heart.

Eventually, I stopped seeing it.... Him there in the unexpected.

That's a hard thing to write. There were years and years where I was numb and going through the motions.

Had he stopped showing up or had I stopped listening?

It sounds like a silly segway, but what if Mary had stopped listening? Or the shepherds? Or the Magi? All those people in the story of the nativity that could have refused to see that God was doing something new, and amazing and unexpected. (Well, I don't know about being able to ignore a messenger and a multitude of heavenly hosts, but you get where I am going.)

If we want to be able to continue to see God show up in unexpected ways, we have to be sure that we have been paying attention. I promise if you start looking you'll see it.

WEEK ONE ACTIVITIES

PLANTING PAPERWHITES:

You can do this later in the week if you need time to get the paperwhite bulbs (available at Home Depot/Lowes/The Christmas Tree Shoppe.)

Gather supplies of bulb soil and a vessel. Fill the vessel with soil and plant the bulb. Tend to them + enjoy. Don't forget to document it, post it, and tag it. You can use this hashtag here #hs_dayofdecember and please tag me @missyjomalley so I can see and we can all enjoy the seasons activities!



WEEK ONE ACTIVITIES

DECORATE CHRISTMAS TREE:

If you have already decorated your Christmas tree, take some time to inspect the ornaments. Some come with stories, I am sure. Tell your kids about your traditions from growing up. Invite your kids to document the decorating. Give them the camera and see what angles and photos they come up with.



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley



MAKING CHRISTMAS GARLAND:

Using a needle and thread, you can string together any combination of popcorn and fresh cranberries, Sometimes we add orange slices or other things.





INSTRUCTIONS:

Tie a piece of baker's twine around the pinecone near the top. This would be the perfect time to reuse a large piece of ribbon, string, or yarn you have lying around the house.

- 1. Add organic nut butter.
- 2. Roll the pinecones in the nut butter until it is completely coated. Let your child dig right in with her hands to get the nut butter in every nook and cranny.
- 3.Add the nuts and seeds.
- 4. Roll the nut butter covered pinecones in the nuts and seeds until the entire surface of the pinecones are completely covered. Push pieces into the folds of the pinecone for an added bonus.
- 5. Choose a place in your backyard where you have seen birds visit before. Hang your bird feeder. Enjoy listening and watching the new feathered friends it brings!

WEEK ONE BAKING DAY

GINGERBREAD COOKIES:

I set this aside for Saturday but you really can do it any day that works for you. This is by far my favorite Gingerbread recipe. Great for making cookies, but we also have used it to make gingerbread houses. The key is to keep the dough rather chilly. So pop it in the fridge between uses.

Here is my <u>FAVORITE GINGERBREAD</u> <u>RECIPE</u>



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley

PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR FAMILY

Teaching someone else how to use light/compose a shot/anticipate a moment can be a monumental task. Not because the concepts are hard to understand, but because (well, two things) photography and art can be very personal, and frankly some rules are meant to be broken and also, because you and only you can choose in what order to prioritize those key concepts. I can only show you what they are.

The big three that I am going to talk about over the course of the next couple weeks are: LIGHT, COMPOSITION, and MOMENT. For me it is in that order.

Light: Where is it coming from? Do I have enough of it? Is it harsh? Is it diffused (soft)? Can I use the light to tell some of my story? Christmas is such a fun time to play with light. There's candlelight, twinkling Christmas trees, warm glowing fires, bright snow *hopefully.



LEARNING LIGHT//LESSON ONE

SHADOWS

Shadows are gorgeous in photos when used the proper way. Think about painting you see (specifically Rembrant paintings, or some of the Dutch Masters.) The light is coming in from the side giving dimension and drama to what's being photographed. Don't be afraid to ask your subject to move closer or further away from a window, or light source to get the kind of lighting that you want.

FLARES

Flares can lend well to your overall composition. Flares used to be seen as the arch-nemesis to photography. People used to seek out lenses for less flare and haze. But more often then not now, photographers are looking for a little flare. You need to be shooting directly at your light source, if you are using a camera, you will see little rainbows pop up in the view finders. Use them how you want! Do you want a rainbow flare to pop across the background or surround your subject? Play with seeing how you can use flare to add to your photo!

NATURAL LIGHT

You can use natural light to light your photographs, you don't need fancy flashes or lighting. Sidelight from a window is one of my favorites. Outside on a sunny day? Use what you have!

But you don't need to use natural lighting to create magic. In fact, you don't even have to spend any money. Guess what? Sometimes I use the fridge light or lamps around my house. Even my cell phone flashlight has come in handy a bunch! Headlights on the car?





LEARNING LIGHT//LESSON ONE

SILHOUETTE

Shooting into a big open sky? Expose for the sky and let your subject fall into the shadows. You can do this in your camera by exposing for the sky. But you can do this on your iphone too by tapping on the screen and dragging up and down on the screen when you see the yellow block. It's the iphone camera's way of allowing you to change your exposure.

POCKETS OF LIGHT

Finding a pocket of light in a room can add so much to your photo. Maybe your dog is laying in the sunshine of an open door? Or maybe the light streaming in the kitchen window hits a certain plant just so? Be on the lookout for pockets of light and see what you can do with them!

Photography is one of those things, you learn one concept and build and build... but it doesn't have to be crazy and technical. I think the most important thing is that you take the time to "see" that you are present in the situations that life lends to, and that you only use your camera as a magnifying glass to inspect the different beautiful pieces of your life. Your photos don't have to be perfect; they just serve as a reminder of the memories that you had and made when you took it.





MONDAY 12/6



SURPRISED BY JOY

Advent is a time of waiting but it is also a time of great celebration. We have the unique opportunity to look back and remember when our Rescuer came to earth to make all things new. He turned the world as we know it upside down. Bringing new life and new joy to a world lost in its own troubles. From the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the garden to the moment Jesus took his first breath earthside, the human race had been doing their best to compete with God, and figure out how THEY were going to "fix" it. A whole race of people who decided to take control from the creator because they thought they knew better. Their plans never seemed to work out, their justice was perverted and bent to their own will, and they were so far from the home and the relationship that they once had with the Father.

Jesus breaking onto the scene was absolutely something to celebrate. For all their trying, the human race could not right themselves. But God could and he did.

In Luke 2:10 the angels proclaim "good news of great JOY, that will be for all people". The Savior wrapped in skin and swaddling clothes, God with us.

I can tell you something.... for some, it came as quite a surprise. It had been so long since anyone had heard a word from the Lord. It was dead quiet. Some had forgotten, some had given up. And in the middle of that dark night, the silence broke.

I can tell you with great conviction why God chose to speak first to shepherds. Because honestly, they were primed to listen. There are people in this life that live a lot closer to calamity, to loss, to "waiting for the other boot to fall". In that situation you have two choices, give up hope, or cling to faith, that God listens, that he cares and that he is going to come. It's easy to live in comfort and a false sense of security and control, but to lowly shepherds (the poor, the outcasts, the rejected, the marginalized).... they were holding out hope that God himself was going to show up.

And he absolutely did, with MULTITUDES of messengers. I can't even imagine what that must have been like. Surprised doesn't even explain it, scared to death is more like it.

Good news of great JOY, that will be for all people today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you . He is Christ the LORD! Imagine the kind of JOY that they had.

TUESDAY 12/7



JOY IN HIS PRESENCE

It's one thing to be far off, it's a whole other thing to SHOW UP. From the beginning of time God has wanted to be with his people. The fact that Adam and Eve were able to walk with God physically in his presence in the garden... What that must have been like! God's intention was always to be "with us".

He demonstrated through history that his longing was always to be with his people. Sin had ruined the relationship with us, but Jesus' incarnation shows God's commitment to be with his people. The great cost of being human. Jesus came close, and lived a life of sacrifice and scrutiny. Just to be near, and to return us to himself.

What kind of sacrifice is it of ours to be in his presence, and present?

We are so good at multitasking (but not really). When was the last time that you just spent time being in his presence, satisfied just to be near? Even as I write this, I struggle to find many examples in my own life.My first instinct in a quiet moment is to fill it. Call a friend, play on the phone, find a chore to do. Anything to fill the time, the silence.

Practicing presence is an invitation to see God. And enjoying his presence is another thing entirely. What if God were always available to you (He is.)

What if he was concerned with the intimate details of your life? (He is.)

What if he sovereignly allowed things to come into your path or even took things out of your way? (He does.)

What if when things seemed out of place or out of control, you found joy in knowing that nothing is out of his and relished the fact that he patiently pursues you. (He does.)

What a gift, and something to be so grateful for.

WEDNESDAY 12/8



CONTAGIOUS JOY

1 Peter 1:8-9

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Who was Peter speaking to in this verse? He was speaking to the persecuted Christians. Everything had been taken away from them. They had nothing worldly to offer. No homes, no possessions, no futures, no hope. But they had something, in the middle of all of those hardships. They had JOY.

They had not seen Christ, they had only heard about him. They had not known him, but they believed and were filled with such joy that it was contagious. It grew like crazy. People wanted what they had! They had Jesus!

How often do we have a relationship that is built on contingencies? If things are going well? If I get that job? If I build that dream home? If my health is good? But what if that was all taken away. Would you still have the joy that you say that you have now.

If pessimism has been your fall back, and complaining has been your first response to difficult situations.... That is something that can be changed with God's help. He says so!

Jesus said to his followers, he says to you. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11)

Take a moment to look at your blessings.

A good friend made me do this in the middle of a hard and anxiety ridden season. She handed me a cup of coffee, a blanket and a piece of paper, she lit a candle next to me and said, "fill that paper with everything you are grateful for, whatever comes to mind". And then she walked away. 30 minutes later I had full paper and a changed perspective.

I urge you to take just a little time and do the same today.

THURSDAY 12/9



SERVING WITH JOY

Psalm 100:1-5

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Servanthood is a lifestyle every Christian should cultivate. This doesn't mean we should spend all our free time volunteering at church or the local soup kitchen. God doesn't divide our service into secular and religious categories or view one as more valuable than the other. What he wants for us is that we learn to serve the people around us with joy!

Serving is sometimes done in the very quiet and hidden places of our lives. This is often hard for me to remember. I love my family, I promise. But honestly sometimes the work is tedious and monotonous and thankless. It is probably the place where I struggle most with having joy. But learning to have joy in these hidden places is refining me. Sometimes I need to call out to ask God to help me find joy in this work.

God wants us to make ourselves available to meet needs, offer help, listen to others, and show kindness and hospitality. He wants us to find joy in serving dinner to our family, walking the dog, or making dinner for a friend. Imagine how we'd stand out in this self-focused culture if we treated the needs of others as more important than our own. If we served others not only willingly but happily.

FRIDAY 12/10



JOY TO THE WORLD

The song Oh, Holy Night has these lyrics: "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn."

At this moment the world seems in many ways, not "right". We are living in these (we all know the words...) "unprecedented times". We were already a culture of overworked, stressed out, anxious and wired and tired people. This year has put the cherry on top of a world that is WEARY.

The world is looking for HOPE and a future. And in a time that is so uncertain, who can we turn to? Good news was announced to the shepherds on that night in Luke 2. "Great joy for all people", the angels claimed. Not some people, not privileged people, not good people, ALL people. When we as believers experience hope and joy in Jesus coming we give hope to this weary world.

CS Lewis wrote, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself. Because it's not there. There is no such thing." He sent his son to be with us. So we did not need to be apart from him. Sharing that reason for hope gives people the gift of knowing they are deeply loved and cared for by their creator.

The good news of the gospel was that we were being relentlessly pursued by a God who loves us desperately and knows us intimately. I don't know about you but that is something to be joyful about.

BLESSING BAGS



Blessing Bags are great to keep on hand in your car, so if you are in a situation where you find someone in need, you have the bag right there to hand to them. Some things you may need: Gallon Size Ziploc Bag – Helps to keep everything together & in one place so they can easily access the supplies in their bags/backpacks. Keeps the items from spilling/leaking onto their personal items in their bags. The bags can later be used for other storage options within their bags – storing toiletries, snacks, etc.

- Hand-Warmers
- Bag of Quarters
- Bottle of Water
- Band-Aids
- Baby Wipes
- Hand Sanitizer another great option to help them feel cleaner
- Wash Cloth buy an inexpensive wash cloth to include.
- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste (travel size if you have a lot of items to put into your bag)
- Floss
- Soap (we bring home soaps from hotels if we don't end up using all of them)
- Deodorant
- Shampoo/conditioner (these are also great products to save from hotels if you don't use them as they're the perfect size for these bags)
- Comb
- Personal hygiene items if you're making a kit for a woman (tampons, pantiliners, pads, etc)
- Sunscreen (depending on time of year)
- Chapstick
- New Socks
- New Underwear
- Inexpensive gloves
- Granola Bars
- Energy Bars
- Tuna/cracker packs
- Trail mix
- Raisins
- Peanuts
- Fruit cup/ applesauce cup (& include a spoon)
- Gum/hard candy
- Hot Cocoa/Spiced Cider Mixes or on-the-go coffee mixes



WEEK TWO ACTIVITIES



ORANGE POMANDERS

A classic craft with an incredible scent. Kids love making these.

How to make pomander balls





CHRISTMAS LIGHT DRIVE

This is a favorite with my family. Sometimes we'll go to Starbucks to get hot chocolate and listen to Christmas music in the car.

WEEK TWO BAKING DAY



CROCKPOT HOT CHOCOLATE

We made this for our Santa Sessions last year and it was a huge hit! The touch of vanilla is amazing.

Crockpot Hot Chocolate Recipe

HOMEMADE MARSHMALLOWS

I've always wanted to make these! I'm so excited to give it a try this year.

Homemade Marshmallow Recipe



LEARNING COMPOSITION //LESSON TWO

Simple Composition : Lines and Form

A composition can be made up simply of only a few elements. How those elements are arranged is how an artist tells a story within the confines of a single frame. Even the most humble subject matter can be evocative if the composition is pleasing.

Leading lines can point you into the frame, towards the subject. You can also have multiple lines that converge into the frame, or towards the subject. I like to bring lines in from the corners. The corners are neutral and these "leading lines" don't cut part of the frame the way a hard line from an edge will.

Shape and form are similar elements of design – the main difference being that things with form are three dimensional, having height, width and depth. Shape is more two dimensional.

Photography is a 3D representation of a scene, so whereas a painting might have more shapes in it, a photograph typically has more forms. The more interesting the form, the more interesting the image. Forms can be geometric like a building or organic, like a person.

Think of how you can use light to define form softly or with more definition so it seems to leap out of the photo.





MONDAY 12/13



PEACE FOR THE FUTURE

I read this devotional by Sally Lloyd Jones almost 10 years ago. It was a book for kids filled with beautiful images called "Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing." I could not say it better than she did in her book so I will let her speak.

"Already....But not yet!

We are living in between Already and Not Yet.

Jesus has already rescued us from the punishment of sin. We are forgiven and free! But the world is still broken. We still sin. We still die. Things aren't the way they are meant to be. One day -- But not yet.

Jesus is coming back again. Not as a baby this time, but as King of the whole world. And he will mend his broken world. There will be no more tears, or sickness, or dying... Even the trees will sing for joy!

While we wait, God wants us to remember:

Sin, sickness, tears and death --they won't last forever. They will come to an end. But joy, love, life and you -- those are forever."

Romans 13:12 'The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.'

This thought, this truth, gives me such incredible comfort and peace in what is to come. It allows me to have peace in the midst of hardships and suffering or watching others suffer in this life. It reminds me of the "not yet" that is to come that is better then we could possibly imagine.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says "...He has also set eternity in the human heart." Our souls weren't made for this world the way that it is now. They were made to be in communion with the Father, they were made for unbroken relationships with others, they were made to be eternal. We are craving a home that we have not yet seen. But we can feel it's pull... when we look around at the sickness and brokenness and death, we know it's not right. We know there is something more.

May God give us the peace that passes understanding and may we have peace in a future that is secure.

TUESDAY 12/14



PEACE ON EARTH Peace on Earth can it be? Years from now, perhaps we'll see? See the day of glory See the day, when men of good will Live in peace, live in peace again Peace on Earth Can it be

Bing Crosby sings this song. I don't even know when or where I heard it for the first time. It's one of my favorite Christmas songs. The idea that some day because of what Jesus has done, because he came... we will one day have complete peace on earth again.

But we can also have glimpses of that peace here, now. Bring God's kingdom to earth, by the way that we lift up, serve and value other people. I can get twisted around in my theology sometimes, I am admitting to the fact that I do not understand all the time.

But even in those places of doubt and confusion and insecurity, one thing is absolutely clear to me. We are made in his image and so are the people we face everyday.

If I do nothing else, let my interactions with the image bearers lift them up and place value on them, and not take it away.

There is no neutral in life, you either add or take away. I want (and often need to be reminded) that I want to make sure that my interactions with and relationships add. That is how we can have peace on earth now, that is how we bring his kingdom here.

WEDNESDAY 12/15



BEING A PEACEMAKER

Jesus didn't just give peace. He WAS peace.

Being a peacemaker does not mean you are a doormat or an avoider of conflict. It is someone who is active at seeking restoration. They are people who listen well, give grace to others, and absolutely RESTORE what is broken. Peacemakers bring unity.

Being a peacemaker is not a personality trait. It's a commandment.

Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

In a theoretical sense, my brain is like "Yeah! Peacemaking, got it." In a heart sense, not so much. It is probably the quality I pray for most in my life, and I hate to admit it, it is a struggle. What kind of qualities are peacemaking qualities? Being patient, impartial, gentle and honoring others. These are not qualities that I bring into my home on a daily basis. These are not the qualities that I show the people I love the most.

The thing is PEACE is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Meaning it is not a result of trying really hard. It is something that comes when you are connected to the source. When you are yielding your life to what God wants, being present with Him and ASKING him to help you be someone who brings peace. In your weeks ahead preparing for Christmas it will become stressful. So many things happen this time of year that add to the strain. Financial burdens for some, family drama, grief for those who are not there, busyness.... It is absolutely a peace stealer.

Take time this week to connect yourself to the Lord and to his word. Ask for the help you need to be someone who brings peace to those around you.

THURSDAY 12/16



COMFORT + PEACE

2 Corinthians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Today we are staring into a darkness that we are struggling to navigate. The unknown, calamity, disasters, sickness and death are still things all of us face today. We know that we need peace, we crave it in our souls. Politics, unrest, disease, violence. These things are not far off... but sometimes it feels like God is. The world can seem like a very dark place.

God offers us his peace not just to carry us through these circumstances but so we can also "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." Because his peace comes from the source, it is a never ending supply. Pour out comfort on those around you and you will continue to be comforted by the peace of God.

In the beginning, there was peace in the Garden. It was never equated with a feeling or a stillness. Instead it was the nearness to God that brought peace. The walking with Him in the cool of the day. I cannot wait for that day when we will be able to do that. Right now, to be close to God... it means taking the time to be in his presence, to be in his word, to be aware of his nearness. Because he is always right there.

FRIDAY 12/17



PRINCE OF PEACE

Sometimes we equate peace with calmness and tranquility or stillness, but peace also means UNITY. Our Prince of Peace did not come to create tranquility, but rather unity in a restored relationship with the Father. But it's not JUST that!

> 2 Corinthians 5:19 God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Jesus did not provide a spiritual ceasefire between God and man. It changed us from enemies of God to children of God... adopted into the family and co-heirs with Christ. That is a lot different. Because of what Jesus did, we didn't just have peace with God, it doesn't stop there. We also had ACCESS to God. One of the most powerful pictures in the Bible to me is the torn veil

I always imagined it to be some flimsy thing (obviously I didn't read it very well.) But it was as thick as a man's hand. The veil before the Holy of Holies was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide and heavy. Rabinic literature says "it needed 300 priests to manipulate it." (Probably a literary exaggeration, but you get the point.) It was BIG!

When Jesus died it ripped from top to bottom (heaven to earth) to make a way for you to access God.

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

For me knowing that I have a restored relationship with God, access and adoption through Jesus work on the cross.... It brings me such comfort (and peace). I hope it does for you too.

WEEK THREE ACTIVITIES



These are fascinating for kids to make their own snowglobes!

https://heyletsmakestuff.com/jar-snowglobe/





HANDMADE ORNAMENTS

There's nothing better than the fragrance of Christmas with pine, cinnamon and orange filling the house!

https://wholefully.com/cinnamonornaments/
WEEK THREE ACTIVITIES





MAKE SNOWFLAKES

Choose a pattern or a coloring page for a simpler craft

https://www.firstpalette.com/printable/sn owflake.html

BRANCH STAR

These beautiful natural crafts make wonderful decorations for packages and gifts

https://youtu.be/ODxMuod5xDY



WEEK 3 BAKING DAY

CINNAMON + NOG

Cinnamon buns with an egg nog flair!

https://www.halfbakedharvest.com/easy-fluffy-eggnog-cinnamon-rolls/



LEARNING CONCEPTS //LESSON THREE

Value

Value refers to how light or dark something is in a photograph. It refers to the shades of white, black, and grey. The beauty of photography is that you can use black and white shades to create powerful images. Oftentimes, photographers who are looking for vibrant colours or other dynamic aspects in a scene will forget to notice how many different tones lie within a potential frame.

Space

The way you put forms and shapes together occupies space within a frame. This arrangement is the composition and also leaves empty or "negative space" around and between other forms. This negative space can become an interesting compositional element as well.

When you're looking for a shot, especially in urban areas or with portrait work, not only are the forms within the frame important but the space that isn't occupied by these forms can be just as poignant. Keep in mind that when using silhouettes, these "forms" can look more like shapes and playing with them to make things look two dimensional can also be a powerful tool in photography composition.

Texture

Texture refers to the tactile element of something. In the case of a photograph, there isn't any one tactile feeling. All photos feel the same. As such, the texture refers to the look of how something is perceived to feel, in reality. If you're taking a photo of a cactus, there's a texture there that gives the viewer an idea of what that cactus FEELS like. Compositionally, making texture a big part of a frame can really give the viewer a sense of a place.



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley



MONDAY 12/20



PREPARE YOUR HEARTS

How many of you have walked into something you just were not ready for. Or worse, something distracting or disheartening happens as soon as you are about to go. The yelling about shoes and being late on the way to church. Or having an untimely conversation right before heading out to something important. The world is absolutely full of distractions. All humans are distracted. In fact I think its the enemy's best opportunity to derail and delay us from being intentionally connected to the Father.

I remember reading The Screwtape Letters as a teen and in the text CS Lewis alludes to just that. "You will find that anything or nothing is sufficient to attract his wandering attention. You no longer need a good book, which he really likes, to keep him from his prayers or his work or his sleep; a column of advertisements in yesterday's paper will do. You can make him do nothing at all for long periods."

And this was before the constant distraction we have in our hands or at a short distance most of the time. I have definitely been the person who's five minutes has turned into an hour scrolling through nothing.

You have spent much of the past few weeks being intentional about preparing your heart and mind. As our time of advent comes to an end, continue to be present and intentional with how you spend your days with your families and with the Lord. This part is the most important part, leading up to that day of celebration.... It's the gauntlett of distractions, what to make for that side you said you would bring, navigating a store full of people, wrapping up last minute gifts, tying up loose ends at work. I am not saying those things do not need to be done. But remember all things are sacred.

Wrapping gifts is service, so is cooking food. Generosity, hospitality and serving are all commandments as believers. Honoring others as you walk through crowds (you might be the only kind face they see that day). That's valuing others and lifting them up, that is sacred too.

"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" 1Corinthians 10:31

I pray that this week you are able to remain present, and continue to prepare your heart for the celebration of Christmas, God's greatest gift to us.

TUESDAY 12/21



PREPARE TO DEFEND

1 Peter 3:15 says,

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

One of the things that I love about the Bible is that it gives us a guide for God's best way available in its pages. I know that we will fall short of its calling (enter Jesus) but if we are intent on listening and implementing the instructions it gives us, life will not be easy by any stretch, but it will be good. There is a vast difference between living a life with circumstances and living a life of consequences. I would prefer to not have to live under the weight of consequences and bad choices that lead me away from THE WAY, THE TRUTH and THE LIFE.

In Peter 3:15 we are given instructions on how we are to live as believers. There is a real temptation as we try to navigate life in this age (in any age really) to blend in with the crowd. Don't offend. Don't make waves. Lay low. There is also a temptation toward the opposite to get angry and defensive, even insulting people who don't believe the same way that you do. Neither of this is what is being talked about in this verse.

1 Peter 3:15 first states to be prepared. Preparation requires forethought, reading and knowing scripture is a really important aspect of being prepared to make a defense.

Second, it states that your answer should be done with gentleness and respect. Sometimes differences in opinions cause people to polarize themselves from each other. Instead of seeking to understand each other, we are just waiting for our turn to speak. Allowing people to tell their story, listening with compassion and respect, will allow for more opportunity for conversations that allow us as believers to be able to speak about the hope that we have in Jesus and his finished work on the cross.



BE WATCHING

Habakkuk 2:1 I will climb up to my watch tower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see what the Lord says...

'Habakkuk sat at a watchpost waiting for God. In ancient Israel, both military outposts and hillside gardens had watchtowers. While these watchposts were usually used to keep an eye out for enemies and thieves, Habakkuk sat in the watchtower with eager anticipation for God's action. Yet, like the night watchmen, Habakkuk himself did not produce anything. He waited and watched. Habakkuk placed himself in the watchtower as an act of trust that God would respond. He waited to "see what he will say to me" (v. 1). Habakkuk did this before he saw any proof that God was acting. He sat in the watchpost because he trusted that he would see God's answer. Habakkuk positioned himself to watch and wait, trusting that God was at work, even before he could see it.

God is working, even when we cannot see it. When times are tough, we can sit in the watchtower. When we do not yet see God's work, we can stand at the watchpost and trust God to deliver."

He has not abandoned us. We need to keep watching and waiting to see what he is already doing.

THURSDAY 12/23

WAITING ON THE LORD

Luke 2:25-32

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,

you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

FRIDAY 12/24



Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing.





WEEK FOUR ACTIVITIES



MAKE CARDS FOR SENIOR'S HOME

It may be late to mail cards for Christmas, but you can still write them for the New Year or just to say Hope this Brightens your Day!





CANDLELIGHT TEA TIME

Hold a candle light tea time with family! This doesn't have to be fancy, just some simple tea lights in a mason jar are enough to make a special occasion.



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley

WEEK FOUR ACTIVITIES





WRAPPING GIFTS

Adding natural materials can be a personal touch. Don't forget to put on your favorite movie and make it fun!



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley



WEEK 4 BAKING DAY

WHITE CHOCOLATE PEPPERMINT HEARTS



Christmas Candy Recipe

WEEK FOUR ACTIVITIES



Photo: Missy Jeanne O'Malley

REST

Create places for rest and coziness, plan them ahead and be intentional. Let it be a preparation not an accident. Make comfy spots in the house with lots of pillows and blankets. Lower the lights in the house or light candles. Go phone free. Be present. Cook together. Play board or card games. Go through old photos. Wear comfy clothes. Have a hot drink. Put away all agendas.



Hope your Christmas is beautiful and sacred and full of memories. Thank you for participating in this Advent devotional with me. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed writing it. Love, Missy



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