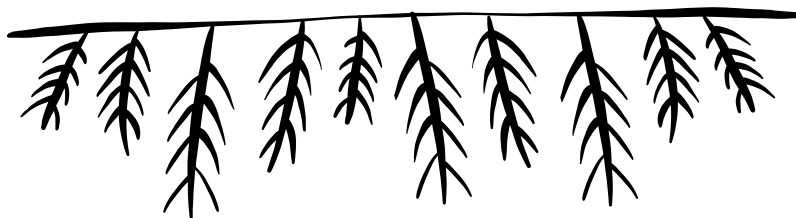


Miracles in the Meantime

A 31-Day Advent Devotional



By Stephanie LaPreal Yttrup

Miracles in the Meantime:
A 31-Day Advent Devotional

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For the Father who saw me when no one else could have, came down to meet me when my mess was too much, showed me the gift of an abundant life with Him, and has never left my side.

For my family and friends who constantly call out my gifts when I can't even see them myself and remind me to never stop chasing the dreams God puts in front of me. Thanks for loving me, encouraging me, and pushing me closer to Jesus every day.

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Introduction to Advent

Over 2,000 years ago, a baby was brought into this world that changed everything forever. He was the One many had waited for. He was the plan all along, but no one really knew what this meant for humanity. What we now know is that it was the new beginning of a world with Jesus in our hearts and here with us forever. We now know that it was the first day of the rest of our lives as redeemed and beloved children of God. We now know that day as Christmas, but Advent is far greater than just a day of remembrance.

Advent literally means the arrival of a notable person or event. Waiting. Advent is the result of waiting, and we all know what waiting seasons can feel like. Often, we don't see the end result in our own timing, and that makes it harder to find meaning while we wait. For Christmas though, we know the ending, and really the end of waiting was just the beginning. But what does that first Christmas all those years ago mean for us *today*? How can the arrival of our Savior bring us love, joy, peace, and hope while we face hard trials?



As I sat on my couch one evening, I glanced up at the wall next to my fireplace. There hung a letter board with a timeless Christmas phrase that I never took down from the prior year.

"A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices."

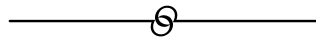
My gut reaction in that moment was not peace, hope, love, or joy. It was confusion, fear, and bewilderment. How, in the midst of tense social climates, political warfare, a mental and physical health pandemic, racial injustice, and complete unrest, could our weary world possibly rejoice?! *How big does hope need to be in a world like this to bring such uninhibited joy in the middle of unimaginable trials?* I didn't know, and I gave that confused and fearful burden to God, knowing that He is the ultimate source of a hope that big.

This world is ever-changing; things are great one day and terrible the next. Trends come and go like waves, and it leaves us spinning and depressed if that's all we're focused on. Christmas, or what many in the Christian faith refer to as Advent, is supposed to be a season of remembrance, hope, and peace. So, here you are, wondering how this Advent season could be different, how it could feel fuller and more energizing, how you can re-discover hope and light despite the chaos of everyday life, shopping, parties, tense family gatherings, and stories of Santa Claus coming to town.

Every Advent season, I feel anxious, worried, lost in the hustle, and I come out feeling more empty. December 25th comes, and I'm like a little kid on Christmas morning. I pray, thanking God for sending His son as a precious babe; we celebrate with family, and then turn the page to the next year and just keep moving forward. I never pause. I never stay still. I never reminisce (until it comes time to plan goals for the new year). I am ALWAYS ready for the next best thing, and

I don't sit still long enough to see what God might be trying to show me *in the meantime*.

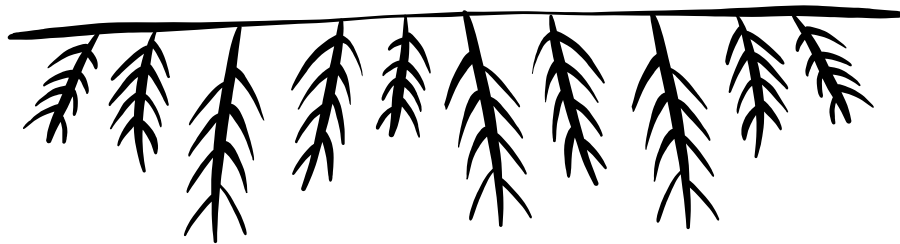
The waiting is the painful part. Sitting still is uncomfortable. I get restless and feel out of control when I wait without knowing what's next. Heck, I don't like waiting when I DO know what's next! God gently reminds me each year to slow down. December 1st comes around, and I am invited by the Spirit to pause, breathe in the wonder, and allow each day to be filled with ways to draw closer to the Reason for the Season.



So, I invite you into the discomfort, the pain, the laughable joy, and the surrender of Advent. My hope and prayer is that this devotional will be a reminder each day to draw near to the One who drew near to you so many years ago and never left your side. Each day is filled with a Scripture to meditate on, a brief story, and a place to reflect and see God in your midst. Taking a page out of Anne Lamott's book, "Help, Thanks, Wow." you'll see additional space to write out a prayer and talk to God. It can be as simple as "help," "thanks," or "wow."

So, light a candle, find that cozy spot, and prepare your heart for God to reveal just what you need this season. Because I know that waiting is messy, but Jesus showed up in the barn of an inn to prove to us that there really can be miracles in the meantime.

meeting us in the
messiness



JESUS IS
our good news

December 1



We live in a messy world, but thankfully it isn't too messy for our Savior to meet us here.

"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'"

Luke 2:10

Let's be honest, there are multiple moments throughout the day when you feel like even Christmas might not do it for you this year. When chaos, frustration, pain or transition swirls around us, it's hard to see "good news of great joy." This devotional is not meant to be full of platitudes and basic holiday greetings that give you that warm fuzzy feeling in December but leave you empty and starving for more in January.

Often we skip to the great joy, but the angel's greeting to the shepherds started with two simple words: "fear not." In order to embrace, remember, and really allow the good news of Christ's birth to transform us to see great joy, we must lay down our fears at the base of the manger. Recognizing that things are not always perfect gives us the space to see the good news for all it's worth, and that's the gospel of grace. So, what do you need to lay down today, friend?

Reflect & Pray

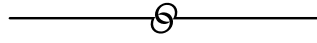


What fear, pain, grief or shame is holding you back from receiving the greatest joy of Jesus' arrival into your heart this Advent season?

As we begin this journey toward Advent, what kind of good news do you need?

Lord, I pray that you would use the next 31 days of this holiday season to remind us that it's all about You. Remind us of Your goodness. Remind us of Your life on earth that brought us closer to You than ever before. Give us the space to hold Your truth tighter than the burdens this world puts on our shoulders. Show us how only You can redeem the time we've wasted just waiting for the great joy at the end instead of recognizing the miracles in our midst. We give this season to You.

Help. Thanks. Wow.



JESUS IS
the creative creator

December 2



From the beginning, God's plan was focused on goodness and grace.

"God saw all that He had made and it was very good."
Genesis 1:31

To grasp the beauty and awe of the gift of Jesus at Christmastime, it's important to go back to the beginning to remember God's plan for all of it. In the seven days God created the world, He made water, sky, land, plants, birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, and humans—literally everything you see, feel, touch, hear and smell in nature is all because of God's creativity. When He finished creating, He said, "THIS IS VERY GOOD." You. God looked at you and said, "You are very good." He is PROUD of what He created.

Because we serve a triune God, Jesus was there at the beginning too. He was with God at the beginning of time, waiting until His debut on earth to be with us and stay with us through the Holy Spirit. Things got a little messy along the way, though.

"The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.'

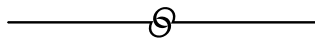
So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of

Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken." Genesis 3:21-23

When Adam and Eve sinned, their eyes were opened to good and evil in the world because that was the tree they ate from—the fruit God told them not to eat. If you know the story, you probably remember the banishing, but read the passage one more time.

God recognized the weight of what life would be like for humanity knowing good and evil, facing the sinful nature within us, and having to live forever like that. I don't know about you, but I'm grateful He banished Adam and Eve from an eternity of knowing pain and suffering! Even when things got messy, God had a plan. He knew what was best, and He was ready for the redemptive promise in His Son Jesus that would come many years later.

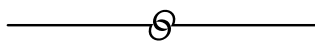
Reflect & Pray



How does this reminder of how God graciously banished Adam and Eve bring you hope?

This Advent, what are your deepest prayers to your Heavenly Father? Write them out on the next page so at the end of the 31 days, you can come back and see how God moved in your heart.

Help. Thanks. Wow.



JESUS IS
in the details

December 3



Our role in the process is to trust.

"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:
Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,
Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,
Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at
the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,
Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary,
and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the
Messiah.

Thus there were fourteen generations in all from
Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to
Babylon,

and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah."

Matthew 1:1-17

Don't miss this. We all tend to skim over genealogies in the Bible because they feel insignificant, but this one is full of rich promises for the Advent season specifically. This lineage is messy. What names do you recognize? In case you don't know them, here are a few of the stories woven throughout this lineage.

Abraham and Sarah waited a LONG time for their child Isaac, and even though they knew the promise of his coming, they tried to take matters into their own hands.

Judah led the idea with his brothers to sell Joseph into slavery due to their jealousy of him.

Ruth lost her first husband, brothers-in-law, and father-in-law before finding Boaz.

David, the youngest in his family and most unlikely to amount to anything more than a shepherd boy was anointed to be King, and hunted for many years by King Saul. While in command, he slept with a soldier's wife, impregnated her, and put him on the front lines of the war so he would die before finding out the mistake David made. TALK ABOUT MESSY.

Amon "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" and was assassinated after ruling for just two years.

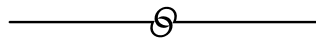
Then there was a season of Jews being exiled to Babylon. To put the cherry on top, Mary, who we know as the mother of Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit before her and Joseph were married. Try explaining that one to dad.

Today's devo is a little study heavy because it's important to see how God's plans for redemption played out in unique and messy ways. As we wait on God's plans to unfold, it can be easy to get swept away in the negativity and chaos that unfolds in our world.

Often times, we may not physically see God's hand at work, but we have generations of truth pointing us to a God who works despite our flaws, shortcomings, and pasts.

When the process is unfolding, we should be focused on the heart and hand of God, based on the promises He has held fast to and the ways He has shown up previously, whether we realize it or not. Trust is the first step in seasons of waiting, and God is inviting you into a season of remembrance. Remember how He has worked in your life previously. Remember the ways He was present for your friends or family. And if nothing comes to mind there, look to the truth of His Word and remember the ways He moved through generations of messiness, sin, angst, and pain to bring the greatest hope of Jesus into the world.

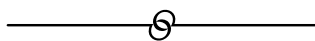
Reflect & Pray



What stories are you being reminded of that point you to God's presence and movement despite the mundane moments?

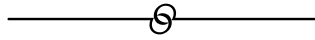
What area is God asking you to trust in His promises a little bit more?

Help. Thanks. Wow.



JESUS IS
timeless & thoughtful

December 4



History itself aligns with the promises and hope God lays out for His people.

Take a deep breath in and count to seven as you do. Deep breath out, count to seven. Seven in Hebrew is "sheba" which also means "promise, oath or covenant."² Seven is one of the most common numbers we see throughout Scripture, 735 times in fact.³

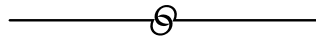
Looking at the genealogy yesterday, you might not have counted how many generations there were, but from the beginning of the promise to Abraham to the birth of Jesus, there are 42 generations.

"So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations." Matthew 1:17

I don't know how long you've been holding onto a specific promise from God or what your waiting season has been like, but Abraham waited 42 generations to see the promise of his family line come to fruition in the arrival of Jesus Christ himself. The Israelites waited 400 years from the time the Prophets last spoke of the Messiah's coming to His actual arrival. Mary and Joseph waited 9 months to see how this crazy, unplanned pregnancy would unfold. Jesus waited about 33 years to fulfill His calling on earth which fulfilled the greatest

promise of redemption for all of us waiting. If history reveals anything, it's that time *does* matter to God, and He recognizes how frustrating, devastating, and even sometimes boring the waiting can be. But what you'll see over the next couple of days is how He doesn't wait to move as we do; He works things out for our good in the meantime—we just often miss it when we're focused on the messiness instead.

Reflect & Pray

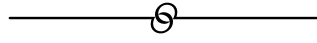


How long have you been waiting for something that makes it hard to be present in the moment?

As you reflect on a waiting season (or maybe one you're in right now), what do you notice about how God moves in the meantime, even when you might not see it immediately?

What does the word "sheba" (promise, covenant, oath) mean to you as you wait?

Help. Thanks. Wow.



JESUS IS
making a way

December 5



Even in the messiest of situations, God makes a way.

"The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.' But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless... He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Genesis 15:1-2, 5

While Abram initially believed God's promise, things changed as time went on and the promise was not yet fulfilled. He and his wife, Sarai, decided to take matters into their own hands. Sarai and Abram chose to pursue an alternate form of offspring.

"But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.'" Genesis 16:1-2

Sarai felt neglected by God since His promise hadn't been revealed in her expected timeline. Feel familiar? While that child, Ishmael, conceived by Hagar, is still a blessing, God had to remind Abram that His promise was greater than anything he and Sarai could perform on their own.

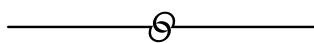
Speaking about Sarai, God said to Abram, "I will bless

her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." Genesis 17:16

God shared a promise with Abram, a GREAT promise at that. Over time Abram and Sarai's doubt crept in, and they attempted to speed up the promise. *Has a sped-up promise ever been better than the original one God had in mind?* In God's graciousness, He didn't shun them for their choices. He made right the situation for Hagar (Genesis 16), and He reminded Abram and Sarai of His promise to them.

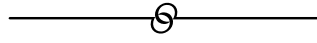
God's promises are never void of action, but His timing is often different than ours. While it wasn't wrong that Sarai and Abram doubted God's timing, their actions of defiance brought more weariness on them than if they had waited patiently. Nevertheless, God made a way through the mess to show them that He is still their "shield and very great reward." We must remember that letting go of our own processes allows God's plans to come through, so the promise is revealed when we need it most.

Reflect & Pray



What matter are you trying to take into your own hands as opposed to trusting God's promise is coming?

Help. Thanks. Wow.



Verses to Remember



"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Ephesians 2:8-10

"The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand."

Psalms 37:23-24

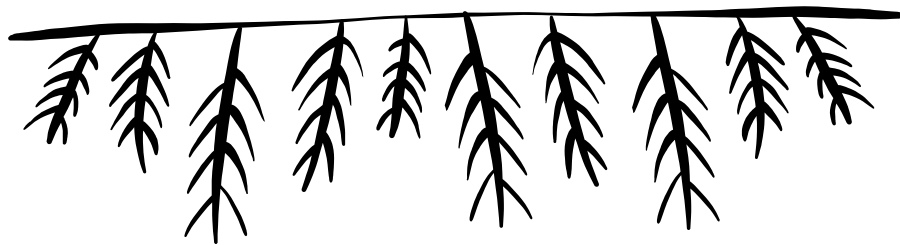
"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

2 Corinthians 12:9

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:22-23

Jesus is more
than enough



JESUS IS

more than we imagine

December 6



Jesus offers more for us at our messiest than we would deserve even at our best.

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Matthew 6:25-30

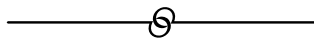
It's important to recognize our messiness in order to appreciate God's expansive and incomprehensible grace and love, but we can't stay focused on the messiness forever. This Advent season, I believe God wants to remind you how much more valuable and precious you are in His sight than anything else. God is *more*, He has created you for *more*, and He offers *more* than you need. So what is it that you are having a hard time moving past in your messiness?

Whatever your anxieties, God offers you more peace.
Whatever your pain, God offers you more meaning.
Whatever your trials, God offers you more joy.
Whatever your joys, God offers you more hope.
Whatever your setbacks, God offers you more setup
for something greater.
Whatever your fears, God offers you more
steadfastness.
Whatever it is, God is more.

God is more, has more, offers more, created you for more, and prepares more than we can even understand. But that means we have to begin the process of laying down whatever is in the way of us experiencing the *more* He is offering. Jesus said it himself, He came to give us more and to be more for us so there would be a day with no more suffering and no more pain.

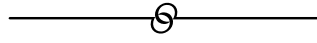
"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."
John 10:10

Reflect & Pray



What messiness in your life are you allowing to hold you back from experiencing *more* in Jesus Christ?

Help. Thanks. Wow.



JESUS IS
greater than all

December 7



What if you're so focused on the moments to come that you miss the more God is doing right now?

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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Ephesians 3:20-21

When Abraham and Sarah were anxiously awaiting their miracle pregnancy, it's obvious they wanted more. They couldn't wait for God's timing, so they tried to rush the process with their own plan. But God had something more for them on the other side.

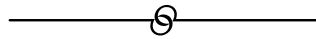
When Mary and Joseph were navigating their unplanned pregnancy, they clearly (and understandably) wanted more. They wanted more explanation. Maybe they wanted more time to explain to friends and family, and I have to imagine they wanted more than an old, dirty, smelly animal stable. But somehow, in the mess, God had more for them than they could have asked or imagined.

When we think about our future and what we want in life, often we reflect that we want more (if we're really honest with ourselves). More time. More money. More friends. More opportunity. More chances. More space. More children.

Christmas manifests itself in America as a way to get and give more stuff. Not all of these are necessarily bad, but are they aligned with the *more* God might have in store for you?

Life is full of possibilities and great ones at that! God sees your heart, knows who He created you to be, and has a plan for you that is greater than you even know. Often, we're so focused on what we want more of in our future that we fail to see the more God is gifting us in our day-to-day lives. God's plan is always greater than our own, and while it's hard to surrender it to Him, it's so worth it in the end.

Reflect & Pray



When has God shown up in your life and done more than you expected?

What is something you want more of that you need to surrender to Jesus, trusting His "more" is better?

Help. Thanks. Wow.

