

INTRO....

Can you feel it? Christmas is in the air! This post-Thanksgiving, pre-Christmas season brings with it some expectations, doesn't it? It is marked by the beginnings of winter, the rush and bustle of preparing for holiday celebrations and the chaos of wrapping up a school semester and the end of a business year. There is A LOT that goes on in this season! Yet, probably the one of the most notable things that happens, certainly for kids and especially for those of us who are Christ-followers, is the momentum that builds as we inch closer to Christmas.

It is in this pre-Christmas season that I think sometimes we can set ourselves up to be super disappointed and totally miss the point of what we celebrate every year about this time.

It might start with our expectations of like a perfect holiday. Ending the school year well, nice long break, great times with cousins and friends and picture perfect family gatherings like every commercial shows for the next three weeks. But your family doesn't look like that or do things like that.

It might be that you're navigating Christmas differently this year because someone is missing in your family, your house, around your table.

It might be that money is a little tighter, mom and dad are a little busier.

School has been a little harder and grades a little lower.

Maybe its because you've been doing this following Jesus thing for a while and you're thinking, again? Didn't we just do this.... Last year?

Or maybe you just look around at the world and you're like really? You aren't fooling anyone. Things are messed up!

The truth is, that sometimes for all the pomp and circumstance we lend this time of year. Christmas can be a little dark. It can be a little bit of a letdown and a rough and tough time of year depending on where we find ourselves.

The crazy thing is that even in scripture, when we encounter these moments of Jesus' family traveling to Bethlehem, what Jesus' family, spiritual family and nation was feeling, we catch a glimpse that things were not glittery, picture perfect or even peaceful. But God chose to shine through the dark streets his people found themselves on.

This week and next we're going to explore how God did and still shines in the darkness that we find ourselves in. Even when things are uncertain and dark at Christmas, God is still telling his story and getting our attention.

Let's Pray quick....

Think with me here a second... Think back to Christmas as a young child, if you can remember back that far! Knit together with the awe and wonder of the seemingly magical time of Christmas is the sharp pain of having to WAIT!

You know Christmas is coming...because we all count down the days! Maybe you have a calendar somewhere in your house where you open a little door to reveal the next number in your countdown to the big day. Or maybe you use candles. Whatever system you do or do not use, we are all aware of the waiting process leading up to Christmas Day, and unless you have put off finishing your Christmas shopping, you hate the waiting!

I can remember as a child getting up at 5am and coming into my parents room wanting to know if we could open gifts (because that is how our family did it, I know everyone doesn't), then back to bed and conspiring with my brothers when it was safe to check again. Back and forth. It was killer. I hated waiting. Do you hate waiting? Not just for presents but other things? Ever think to yourself, God can we please hurry this up?!?!?!?

I don't know if you've ever thought about it or not, but there is some waiting involved with the Nativity story. Not only had Jesus' family and nation waited for centuries to see God do something miraculous, we get the idea that some were losing hope that God was going to do what He'd promised He'd do.

In some ways I think we maybe can share this view in our lives. We're often wondering if God's ways are really going to pan out. Make sense and work. Our distaste towards waiting is a big issue for us because waiting can have huge implications in our lives! Let's consider the "why" behind their waiting and ours. Along the way you just might understand a bit more how beneficial waiting can be, and the unique role it plays in our history and our future as Christ-followers. We will start today with a word that may be a new one for you: Advent. Advent is all about waiting.

WHAT IS ADVENT?

Starting in the 4th century, Christians would celebrate the weeks that led up to Christmas, and the waiting process that preceded Jesus' birth. We call this pre-Christmas experience ADVENT.

ADVENT means “THE COMING” and it is all about WAITING for JESUS.

So, before we get to Jesus' birth, let's start way back in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah was giving God's instructions to His people, who were not being extremely obedient. So as a sign of how God would one day provide a way to solve the sin problem that continued to separate them from Him, God unveiled a clue to the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah 7:13-14 *“Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*

This is one of Isaiah's prophecies that was not fulfilled for over 700 years. That is a long time to wait! If you have spent much time reading about Isaiah's audience, you know just how BAD God's people were at waiting. They had actually developed a great history of impatience!

1. **Genesis 16:1-4** – Abraham is told he would have a son but he is unwilling to wait for God's timing so he takes matters into his own hands...and kind of sets off a family conflict that lasts for thousands of years.
2. **Numbers 20:8-12** – God tells Moses to speak to a rock to make water come out, but he loses his patience and smacks it with a stick. His impatience resulted in him missing out on entering the Promised Land.
3. **1 Samuel 8:19-22** – God's people grow tired of following Him and want a king...just like all the other nations had...and so God gives them what they want. This leads to the division of Israel and lots of people dying.
4. **1 Samuel 13:8-10** – No surprise here. The king that Israel chose had a problem when he had to wait for Samuel to show up to make a sacrifice. This ultimately leads to his own demise in a downward spiral that took the throne from his family.

Now I know we think we are better, smarter, more educated, more spiritual than these boneheads in the Old Testament, *[said sarcastically]* but don't we still

struggle with the same things? Aren't we still continually stuck on ourselves and focused on getting our way and in our own timeline? The unfortunate truth is:

WE ARE INHERENTLY IMPATIENT & PRIDEFUL.

OUR RESPONSE TO WAITING...

Hopefully you and I have been able to learn from the mistakes of the people in the Old Testament. But it is still pretty likely that we all struggle with patience and waiting on God's timing. Here is where we will see one of the first implications that waiting can have in our lives. **Our response to waiting reveals where our trust and where our hope really resides.**

Think about it. When you have to wait, for even a minute, how do you respond? Perhaps it is while you are in the car and there is a slower car in front of you, or when Netflix is buffering, or when your phone is trying to connect to Wi-Fi. What is your reaction? "I HAVE STUFF TO DO!" "GET OUT OF MY WAY!" "I WANT IT NOW!"

The book of Proverbs speaks to this struggle directly in chapter 14:

Proverbs 14:29 (CEB) *"Patience leads to abundant understanding, but impatience leads to stupid mistakes."*

When we glance through the accounts of the people in the Old Testament we see that their impatience and their prideful attitudes led them to some HUGE failures!

- 1. Abraham**, had a kid with his wife's servant and started a world war
- 2. Moses**, disobeyed God and missed out on the Promised Land
- 3. Israel**, elected Saul, lost thousands to war, turned from God
- 4. Saul**, chose to cut God out, lost his crown, and this led to both his and his son's death

We are inherently impatient people, and the end result of our impatience is always the pain of stupid mistakes. This is why God is so intentional with the process of waiting. And this is not just about waiting for things, but the process of waiting for Jesus. Our waiting is not just a personal struggle of our will. **It is truly a spiritual battle that we are in as we wait on God.**

THE WAITING CYCLE...

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a well-known German theologian from the 1930 and 40's, once said about advent that: ***“celebrating Advent means learning how to wait. Waiting is an art which our impatient age has forgotten. We want to pluck the fruit before it has had time to ripen. Greedy eyes are soon disappointed when what they saw as luscious fruit is sour to the taste. In disappointment and disgust they throw it away. The fruit, full of promise rots on the ground. It is rejected without thanks by disappointed hands.”***

(Banana illustration 1-green 1-ripe) Wow, that is powerful isn't it? If you have ever eaten a piece of fruit that was not quite ripe, then you know the frustration and bitterness that comes as a result of not waiting. There is a painful path that we take when we are unable to wait:

**Impatience (leads to) > Pride > Emptiness > Bitterness
Patience > Humility > Fulfillment > Joy**

This cycle happens for us constantly, doesn't it? Whether your impatience is felt more in regards to your anger, purity, or even just greed, our inability to wait always leads us to a place of emptiness and bitterness! But when we wait on God and follow His timing, we are always led to a place of fulfillment and joy!

SIMEON SAYS

Let's bring this back to Christmas, shall we? While there are lots of accounts of humanity's failures in the Old Testament, when we look into the Gospels and see Jesus' birth we find a man who took this process of waiting to heart and received the great benefits of God's promises. His name is Simeon.

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.’”

In those days, Simeon had been waiting patiently to meet Jesus with the same anticipation that you and I wait for Christmas now! And his waiting was rewarded when he got to hold baby Jesus in his arms and bless him. The big difference that makes Simeon's waiting something that honored God and led to his fulfillment had nothing to do with how long he had to wait; it was all about his FOCUS while he was waiting. Here's another quote from Bonhoeffer that will tie this all together for us:

"The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come. For these, it is enough to wait in humble fear until the Holy One himself comes down to us, God in the child in the manger. God comes. The Lord Jesus comes. Christmas comes. Christians rejoice!"

Simeon's focus was not on himself, it was on the arrival of Jesus! He waited in humility and showed his patience in the waiting process. Just like Simeon soaked up the anticipation leading up to meeting Jesus, we have that same opportunity every year as we experience the advent of Christmas.

As Christmas gets closer, we are all waiting for something. You may be waiting for the end of the semester, or a present that you are hoping to receive. But our waiting should be focused more on remembering that our celebration is about the arrival of the Messiah. That is something worth waiting for!

What Are You Waiting For?

Small Group Questions - December 1st 2021

- Big Idea: Waiting may seem like a lonely and unpleasant place, but God can use it. **When our patience grows, so does understanding.**
- Scriptures: Genesis 16:1-4, Numbers 20:8-12, 1 Samuel 8:19-22 & 13:8-10, Proverbs 14:29, Luke 2:25-32
- What is your favorite Holiday/Time of year/Celebration?
OR
- What are three things you feel like are celebrated in your house this time of year?
- Jesus' ancestors weren't great at being patient, neither are we. Scale of 1-10 how patient of a persons are you? (1-not at all <-> 10-I can do this all day.)
- Have you ever seen Proverbs 14:29 come true in your life or someone else's?
OR
- We said... **Impatience (leads to) > Pride > Emptiness > Bitterness**
Patience > Humility > Fulfillment > Joy
Has life ever played out like this for you? Can you think of an example?
- What are you most impatient with? Where are you most impatient with God?
- What are some questions or thoughts Simeon's drums up for you? (About him, God or his life)
- How was Simeon's approach and his ancestor's approach different?

The idea we're running for here, is that if we're willing to approach Christmas (and even more so God) patiently waiting, we might just grow in our understanding of what God was up to and still is.

DON'T FORGET: Remind them of their Devo's for Advent and to follow along best they can throughout the week, with each other and online if they want.