



December 2012

Dear friends,

My husband and I went on a date a few weeks back, near the end of November. Everywhere we looked or listened, it seemed people were hustling and bustling around for Christmas. I wondered aloud why are we not into all the hoorahs.

Here's a little secret... I could care less about Christmas. No, I am not a bah-humbug or anti-Jesus. Actually, I really love Jesus and find myself desperate for Him. Every day I wake up and have a greater resolve that I want to follow Jesus, closer and harder than I did the day before. He's really the only One that matters and the more I know Him, the more I fall in love with Him.

But Christmas in America is all wrapped in a package with a pretty bow on top and labeled the celebration of Jesus. Is that true or is it more of a ritual and expected tradition? When I think of the hustle and bustle of Christmas, I picture the Black Friday shopping lines, the crazy traffic, the Christmas parties, the mischievous elves, the decorations, the parades, the stuff. The Christmas shopping list is long and filled with things that will be old news next year or in a few weeks. All that busyness makes me tired and unsatisfied.

Of course I try to keep all that hush-hush because who wants to admit you really don't like Christmas? During our date night, I just wanted to understand why. Why was I dreading putting the Christmas tree up, planning the annual Christmas party or hunting down some gifts for people I love?

And then it hit us, Christmas is about traditions. Christmas is repetitive. Every year we can expect what will happen. Almost every year is the same. We throw candy and cups in parades. We eat the same yummy appetizers we enjoyed last year. We have the same people to shop for. We have problems with the lights not working on our Christmas tree. We watch people use a lot of energy making an elf do silly things in hopes for a laugh. It feels meaningless to us. Why?

Christmas lacks adventure for us. We thrive in the random, in change and chaos. We grow best when we are dependent on Christ, hanging on for the wild ride. We actually find we have come to enjoy the wild ride.

Then, we realized the most obvious. We want Jesus every day. We do not want the once a year Jesus. We are not looking for holiday cheer. We are in love with this Jesus of Christmas. We find everyday life the adventure. December seems a let-down, a sham, a watered down version of something so much better. Jesus does not fit in that package under the tree. He is better than that. Lights twinkle, but Jesus is the Light of the world. All that stuff costs money, but Jesus costs us nothing.

We thought about the times we felt most alive, most free. Not one of our memories comes back to Christmas. We find ourselves most full when life has found us in a village in Africa, watching our kids worship Him in Belize, trying oxtail with our friend Beulah or riding bikes in the rain with our kids. We love the nights where we pray with community in front of a blazing fire, sleep on the porch with our friends, go on a night hike to see and listen for God, sing old Gospel spirituals, or cuddle in bed with our kids for a wholesome movie. We feel alive in Jesus as He provides what we need just in time, our children find solace in scripture to combat their fears, or a brother or sister falls in love with Jesus. We appreciate the non-descript days when He gives us the courage to lay down what we want to follow Him.

So, all of this to say, if you do not know the intimate Jesus we are describing, you do not know the real thing. He is simple, faithful and true. Jesus was born in a stable and lived with very little his entire life. He brings lasting joy and peace. He is never going to leave or forsake you. He is the most loyal friend. He died for us so that we might live with Him.

If you feel any pressure this Christmas, lay down all those cultural expectations. None of it matters. Jesus wants all your affections anyway. He looks at you the same whether you give your child ten gifts or none. He does not care if you have a Christmas tree in your home. God created millions of trees you can enjoy for free and the moon to light them. He is not judging your wrapping paper or whether your kid has an elf on the shelf. He is not worried about what party you host or if a turkey graces the table for Christmas lunch. He wants us to open our eyes and minds and understand that December 25 and February 10 and September 18 and June 2 can all have the same joy, excitement, love and peace.

How? Jesus is with us all those days and every day in between. Jesus commanded us to share and give every day. He tells us to open our homes to others. Hospitality is not just for Christmas. He teaches us to love. Jesus says in John 10:10, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* Jesus is for every day, not just one month of the year. He knows He is enough for us and He keeps waiting patiently for us to get that simple, profound truth.

As we race through another December, let us remember Jesus. *"I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.'"*- Psalm 16:2. We have no reason to get bogged down by expectations of this world. None of it matters. Our kids do not have to have the latest, greatest gift. Most memories have nothing to do with stuff anyway. If we do not decorate a tree, we can enjoy someone else's. If we give out of expectation or obligation, what was the point? Isn't the point of a gift seeing part of the heart of the giver?

Here is what I have enjoyed about this Christmas...

- praying with community before the Alabaster parade
- seeing God provide food boxes, bread, meat and space heaters for families
- my friend's daughter dancing to parade music
- watching one of our painted murals be ripped off our trailer by the wind and not damaged
- hearing how much fun my kids had at the Briarwood Nativity that they went to with friends
- getting out of my house after being sick a week to share laughter, coffee and conversation with other women
- watching my kids give random blessings to strangers
- sharing a thank you basket with the staff of the grocery store where we purchase food for food boxes
- seeing donations leave our office to be shared with families in Guatemala, Sav-a-Life and Lovelady
- hearing about a child's change of heart
- my kids painting beautiful pictures
- sharing some plenty to meet someone else's need

Notice most all the above and more happens every day of the year. Please, enjoy Christmas. Have fun with your family. Laugh, make memories. Celebrate Jesus. When January 4 arrives, do not stop. Pursue the Jesus I know, the One who died for us, who wants a relationship every day, who cares about you, who has a plan for your life, who takes us on the wild ride. Obey this Jesus. Give up the pleasures of this world to follow Jesus. He is where freedom is! *"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. - John 8:36"*

In conclusion, please keep my confession about Christmas a secret. Who wants to be known as THAT person? Love me anyway. And if you want to know more about the only Jesus you can intimately know, please ask a Grace Klein friend.

Love, joy, peace,