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## PRACTICING PRESENCE

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us. John 1:1, 14

In a world and a season in which all seem to be clamoring for presents, it seems wildly countercultural to focus on slowing down and being fully present with others. However, for those who follow this infant Jesus to Bethlehem, to the cross, and out of the open tomb, THIS is what God was up to in sending God's son, our savior - practicing presence with us!

Shortly after Halloween, wrapping paper and gift bags, ads for this season's hottest gifts to purchase, and invitations to parties and gatherings appear everywhere. Calendars are double booked. Credit cards threaten to be maxed out. And all of the generations whine about how busy they are.

Several decades ago, one cold December night at 4:00am I found myself gift wrapping and packing gifts to be shipped to extended family and friends around the country. I was tired and grouchy and feeling unloving and unlovable. I could have won the Grinch lookalike contest, before he existed. This was not the life I wanted to lead ... and I had created it.

That night, I made a resolve: I was going to do Advent so that two things would be different on December 26th:

- Jesus would have come to me this Christmas, and
- My family would still be happy to be related to me.

I have lived into an Advent that I love to embrace, still fine tuning it year after year. Now, this is a season that gives me life, and that abundantly.

Whether you live alone or with a household full of busy people, take a look at the "Family Practices" below and select the ones you'd like to try for you and your circle of beloved people this year.

## FAMILY PRACTICES

- Take out your calendar now and block out family time. This is not time to accomplish tasks, but to be together. Just to be.
- Lower the lights during time together. Park screens in another room. Light a candle. Sit by the Christmas tree.
- Check in with one another. Right now, ask everyone in your household, "What are the three things you would like to see, hear, do, eat, or play to make it feel like Jesus has come to you and to us this Advent season?"
- Use this list to trim the things that have become time, resource, and money-consuming for your family, without giving rich benefits. Henry David Thoreau said it this way, "Simplify, simplify, simplify."
- Find an Advent devotional that all of you enjoy. Spend a few minutes together to share it. Some days, it might stretch into an extended conversation. Some days, it might be wrapped up in just a minute or two.
- Share the tasks. When everyone pitches in, no one claims the mantle of martyr and resents the rest of the family.
- Add just one thing for your household - an act of service. Ring bells for the Salvation Army. Serve a meal for shut ins at church. Bake a plate of cookies for a lonely neighbor and sit down for tea. Shovel a walk that isn't yours.
- On December 26th, check in with your family. How did we do? What did you like about this year? What should we do the same next year? What should we do differently? How might we further simplify

and let people know now ... or before July ... that we'd like to do things differently next year.

***Wishing you and yours  
an Advent to remember,  
as you  
practice presence.***

Links to learn more!

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