

First confession: I didn't learn that Advent was an actual thing until I started attending a Presbyterian church about six years ago - the candles, celebrations, and wreaths were not on my non-denominational radar. The concept behind Advent was used in my non-denom experiences, but they weren't named as such (because they had to be cool, hip, and non-conforming).

Advent is the season of expectant waiting for Jesus' arrival - a season of hope, joy, love, and peace. Families and friends light a candle each Sunday morning and tell what that candle symbolizes, while pastors' sermons eloquently expound on these promises and what it means in our lives. It's a breath of fresh air amid the world's chaos in this Christmas season.

Second confession: for me, this time of year is the advent of my depression (one of many). There's a lot of factors going into the pot that make up my depression this time of year: the loss of family and friends right before Christmas, loneliness, the pressure to buy, to give, to receive, and repeat. Feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, forced-smile-ness. Thinking that I'm on the outside looking in, never quite good enough, never entirely invited. Brown drab colors, less daylight, cooler weather. It's all of this (and more that can't be named) which makes this time of year challenging and difficult for me.

Don't get me wrong - I don't hate Christmas - I think it's a lovely time of year, but I don't always feel like the Christmas season is meant for me. It's fine for others and I will admire the decorated trees and twinkling lights from a distance, but I feel like they aren't ever within my reach. In this season I begin to question God's role in my being - did God make me this way? And if so, why do I have this flaw in my created being? If God didn't make me this way, why would a loving being want me to wrestle with this depression year after year? I don't know what to do with all these questions and their lack of resolution, but I keep asking them and demanding answers. And this gives me hope that someday my questions will have answers and I won't be left wondering anymore.

And I take joy in knowing that this depression is not the full definition who I am. I am also a creative, intelligent, kind, compassionate, (relatively) funny, dependable, punctual person who is deeply loved by God. It's a good feeling to know that I'm more than I think I am - my perspective isn't always truthful, and I don't always see the full picture of me. How joyful to know that we're more than we think we are!

As my personal advent makes its way into my life, I can lean on my family and friends to walk beside me on these darkened paths. Even when I don't ask for it, I know that there are people in my life who can recognize when I need them. My grandma passed away this last summer, and one of my classmates took me to Sonic and simply asked, "How are you doing with it all?" That's love. The presence of others who sacrifice their time and ask questions is like a warm blanket when I'm the coldest I can feel.

I find peace in knowing that I'll have other seasons soon enough - this won't last forever. It may take a while, it may linger longer than I'd hoped, and it may rear its ugly head when I least expect it, but there are better times to come. It may be the darkest in this hour (and it's really scary when it is), but the light will soon dawn. When I was first diagnosed with depression I thought that that was it - that's where my life would be, but things got better. And then they didn't. But I've learned that there's a cycle in my life - and this brings me peace because this isn't the end of my story, but merely a small part of it.

If, like me, you struggle with depression, I pray that you can find reprieve (even for the briefest of moments). If you need someone to walk with you in these feelings, know that you are surrounded by people with God-given gifts who can and will be with you. My friends, I pray that you can find hope, joy, love, and peace in your lives and in this holiday season.

much love. sheth.