**Christmas Presence**

by Michelle Hipp, LCSW

Recently, I asked my (now adult) children, “What do you remember about Christmas as a child?” I asked this question because, as a single parent, I often felt like I wasn’t hitting the mark. No matter how hard I tried to keep all those silly ducks in a row, the “row” never seemed straight, and something was always forgotten. Like when I sent my son on a field trip to swim without a bathing suit. Or the time it was my turn to carpool, and I forgot to bring home one of the kids…praise the Lord for the grace this child’s mother extended to me. I always felt like I was running a million miles a minute and getting nowhere. By asking my kids about their childhood experiences, I was making sure I didn’t mess them up too badly along the way.

Honestly, I expected them to remember when we were nominated to receive Christmas gifts through the Toys for Tots program; they blessed us with so many gifts they filled our entire living room. We spent hours opening those presents. Or the time our extended family broke into our house and provided gifts for all three of us. I’m not an easy person to surprise, but they got me that year. Their thoughtfulness and generosity blew us away. But those weren’t the memories that had been etched into their hearts.

My daughter said, “I remember looking at all our Christmas ornaments while hanging them on the tree and you telling stories about each of them.” My son responded, “I remember waking you up early on Christmas morning saying ‘Mama Santa came’ in an accent that no one else can replicate. We all still laugh about that all these years later.

You see, neither of my kids spoke about the presents they received, but both remembered the presence of us being together and creating memories. I couldn’t afford to buy them everything they wanted; they never had the latest and greatest things, and sometimes they didn’t like that. But now, as they look back on their childhood, they can see the actual value of the gift of being present.

If we aren’t careful, we can begin to allow the world to define our experiences and situations. We then buy into the commercialism of Christmas instead of the true celebration of our savior’s birth. When we do this, we measure ourselves against the faulty measuring stick of this world and determine that we aren’t doing enough, spending enough, or being enough. Say “no” to the world’s standards and instead create a few traditions of your own. Read about the birth of Jesus in Luke 2 as a family. Bake Jesus a birthday cake, or you can do as I did and buy the kids a Christmas ornament that represents what they liked or were passionate about that year. Then, while decorating the tree, you can look back over the years and ponder all God has done.

*In Psalm 16:11, David states “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” David experiences the joy of the Lord when he is in God’s presence.*

If you’re single this Christmas season, I want you to know…I see you. It can be challenging to navigate through the holidays in a world that seems to be created for couples. If you’re single and a parent, I see you as well. I spent 21 years raising two kids on my own. I know the struggles, the tears, and the fears that can come with that. Keep in mind that while you may be navigating Christmas celebrations or raising kids on your own, you are not alone. God is with you every step of the way and will lead and guide you through even the most difficult seasons.

Father God, I lift my single brothers and sisters to you, Lord. May their celebrations be joyful and full of you, Jesus. Speak hope into their dreams and renew their spirits. Guide them on your path for them and help them feel your tangible presence this Christmas in Jesus' name.

***BIO*** *– newly married Michelle wears various hats on any given day, but her favorite is Daughter of the King. She lives in the beautiful mountains of South Carolina, where she works as a Child and Family Therapist. She has been a single mother for 18 years and loves to watch God take her most difficult struggles and transform them into passionate purpose. Today, Michelle has joyfully embraced her passion for speaking truth into the lives of others and assisting them in finding and living out their true identity in Christ. She believes we must uncover the lies and labels, identify the root, and replace it with God's truth.*