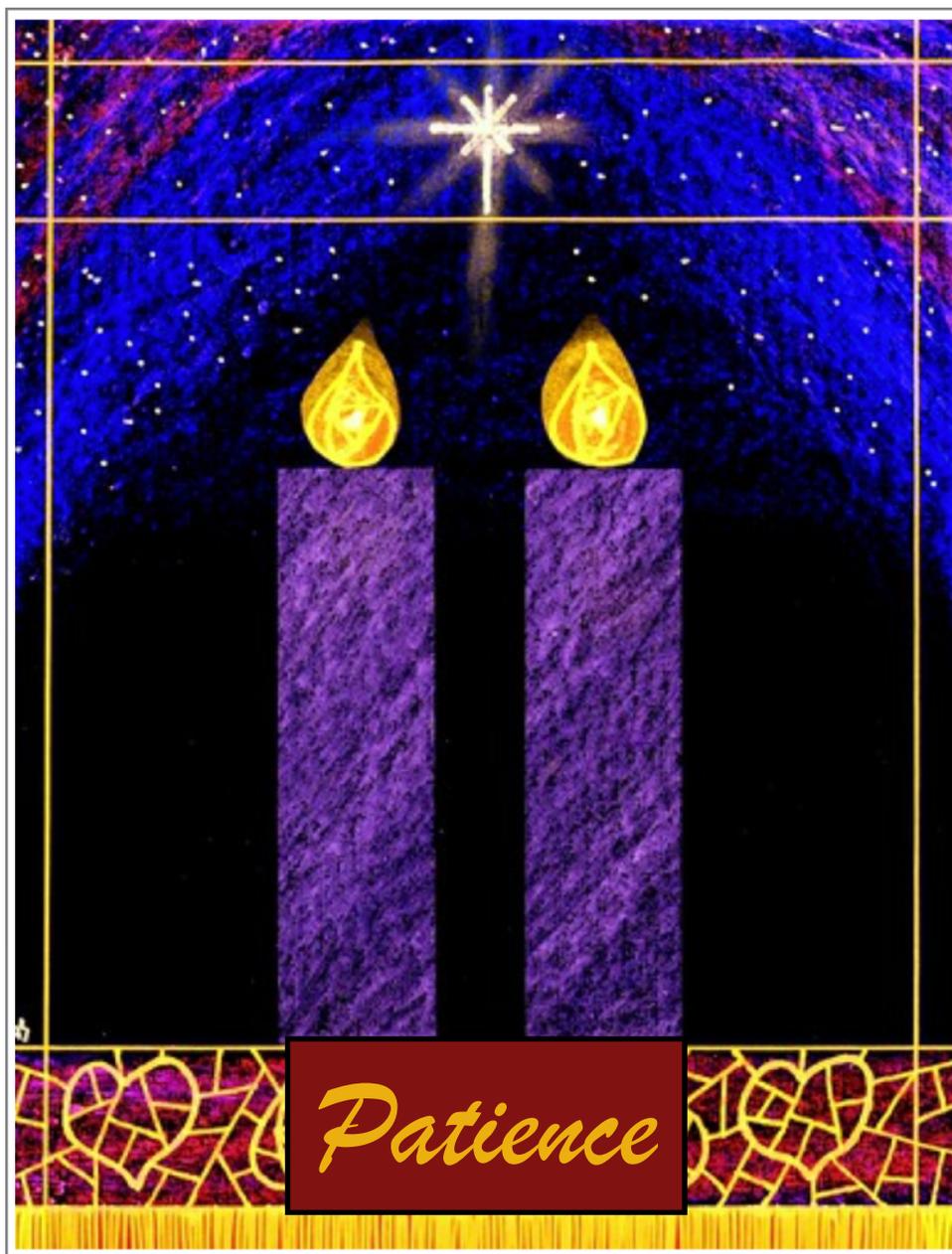


“Patient Preparation”

Luke 3:1c, 3-6

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Pastor John Ortberg was giving a bath to his three children. Johnny was still in the tub. Laura was out and safely in her pajamas. He was trying to get Mallory dried off. Mallory was out of the water, but was doing what has come to be known in their family as the *'Dee Dah Day dance.'* This dance consists of running around and around in circles, singing over and over again, "*Dee dah day, dee dah day.*" It was a relatively simple dance expressing great joy. When Mallory is too happy to hold it in any longer, when words are inadequate to give voice to her euphoria, she has to dance to release her joy. So she does the *Dee Dah Day.*

On this particular occasion her father was irritated. "*Mallory, hurry!*" he prodded. 😞 So she did. She hurried. But not as her father intended. 😞 Instead, she began running in circles faster and faster and chanting "*Dee Dah Day*" more rapidly.

"*No Mallory that is not what I mean!*" said her father. "*Stop with the dee dah day stuff and get over here so I can dry you off. Hurry!*"

Then Mallory asked her father a profound question: "*Why?*" 😊 Why did she have to hurry?

John Ortberg suddenly realized he had no answer. He had nowhere to go, nothing to do, no meetings to attend, no sermons to write. He was just so used to hurrying, so preoccupied with his own busy-ness, so trapped in this rut of moving from one task to another, that here was life, here was joy, here was an invitation to the dance right in front of him--and he was missing it.

😊 So he got up and he and Mallory did the *Dee Dah Day dance* together. ¹

My guess is that most of you can relate, especially parents. We can get so busy . . . We can have so many little things on our agenda . . . We can be so stressed out . . . that we forget to do a little *Dee Dah Day dance* with our children. Not just because it's good for our children, but also because it's good for us.

As important as a regular dose of a lil dancin' a lil laughin' a lil lovin' is for our children it is just as important for us. Particularly at this time of year. Parties to go to. Packages to wrap. Christmas cards to write. How does anybody ever get it all done?

Hmmm, maybe a better question is, does anybody ever get it all done? That's why we used to call it the rat race, isn't it? We get so used to hurrying, so preoccupied with our own busy-ness, so trapped in this rut of moving from one task to another, that here is Immanuel, God with us, here is eternal life, here is boundless joy, here is an invitation to the dance with the Lord of the dance right in front of us--and we're missing it.

When John the Baptist quotes Isaiah saying, "*Prepare the way for the Lord*" he's doubling down on to his charge to repent. He's saying this is infinitely more than saying sorry and trying to do better. He's saying this is a serious commitment to making a complete change in the direction of our lives toward God.

One of the best examples of this kind of commitment to making a complete change in the direction of our lives I've come across recently is from a tattoo shop owner friend of ours. He recently told me shop owners across the country have seen a significant uptick of people wanting to erase or covered up hateful tattoos. Some of those tattoos were honest mistakes; they just weren't aware of the implications of their tattoos when they first got them. Others were former members of full out hate groups. Nonetheless, they're not just covering up the hate tattooed to their bodies by wearing long sleeves even in the hottest days of summer. No, they're all in. There's no going back. This is a commitment to making a complete change.

He told me it started about 6 months after the 9/11 attack at the World Trade Center, when a middle eastern gentleman wanted a tattoo on his stomach covered up because it had something to do with terrorism. Before covering up or removing a tattoo, an artist spends a lot of time with the client. They want to make sure the client has had a sincere change of heart and mind. They often have to ask the clients to have patience because they so desperately want to get the hate off of their bodies and out of their lives. Once they're sure that the client truly has given up their old ways, then do the work. That's how our friend found out that the middle eastern gentleman was a member of a terrorist cell in California. The client left right after the bombings because he realized that was NOT who he was. The owner took multiple photographs, including of his face, to help the artist plan the cover up. He even went to the extent of having the client fill out a release form and copied his ID before starting the work. To be safe, to double check and make sure, they sent everything to the FBI. About



halfway through the tattoo coverup his client told him that the FBI had contacted him. As a result of their cooperation the FBI was able to take down the entire terrorist cell.

Tell me that’s not the commitment to making a complete change John the Baptist’s talking about? Many Tattoo artists do this kind of work for free, they say, “***I don’t care what your backstory is. I care about tomorrow. You want to erase it then I’m going to be there for you . . . And we’re just going to move forward and I’m going to give you a new way in life.***”² Tell me that’s not a Christ like story, not caring about the backstory, freely giving others a new, better way of life with God.

We know that it’s actually as, if not more difficult for us for a ton of reasons. Biggest of which is we do not have the power within ourselves to live as we ought to live. So again and again and again, every minute of every day we must throw ourselves on God’s mercy and grace. That doesn’t sound very Christmas-y does it? Because unworthy people need mercy and grace. Broken people need mercy and grace. Hurt people need mercy and grace. And we’re with it; we’ve got it all figured out. Don’t believe the lie. That’s who we are. You and me. Unworthy. Broken. Hurt. And I’m chief.

But here is the Good News! We have a God who loves us and is willing to meet us right where we are. That’s why God sent the Christ child, to walk in our shoes. Immanuel—God with us.

Friends, That’s why being a son or daughter of the living God requires patient preparation. Because it’s a constant, struggle and it begins with a turning back to God again and again and again. It requires a commitment to right living, again and again and again. And it means receiving God’s grace and mercy, again and again and again. God is offering it. The only question is will we have the patient preparation to accept it so that you can do the ***Dee Da Day Dance*** with ***the Lord of the Dance?***

Amen?!

¹ John Ortberg, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

² Adapted from Dr. Keith Wagner, St. Paul’s United Church of Christ, St. Paul’s UCC, <http://www.bright.net/~coth/whenlove.htm>.

