

Christmas Glow # 1 Bitter woman

Christmas - the season of love and giving - twinkling lights, warmth, glad tidings and good cheer. Well, maybe for some. I used to like Christmas and all the things that went along with it. "Used to" being the operative term there.

Life has a way of sucking the life out of a person, you know what I mean? Pain changes things. It changes people. Now Christmas is just another day to me. I try to ignore it, though it's rather difficult. I mean, just look around for goodness sakes. They try to sell glad tidings and good cheer on every street corner. Everybody's trying to make a buck where they can, I guess.

I use to believe in it all. Actually, I do have a few fond memories of Christmas from when I was a kid. But I grew up, got married, had a couple of kids of my own.

There were a few years where things were pretty decent, you know? But we fell into this pattern of fighting that just went on and on. We had been married fourteen and a half years the day I came home and found him gone. My husband - he was just gone without a trace. No note, no good-bye, not a personal belonging of his left in the house. And it was Christmas.

I knew he had been depressed... I mean who doesn't struggle? But I didn't see that coming. And it just... changed everything. It changed me. It changed my kids.

I think that's why my son has gone off the deep end the past couple of years. He didn't finish school... alcohol and drugs, I'm pretty sure. Now he stays out all night and sleeps all day. He doesn't talk to me. We are, as the say, 'two ships that pass in the night' but I get the feeling that both these ships are slowly sinking vessels.

My daughter had her first baby when she was sixteen. She's pregnant again, living with her new boyfriend. I try to help her -

little Madison is usually with me if I'm not working.

My life is hard. I think I've probably screwed up a lot of things. But if I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't know where to start to change things. I just know it's not supposed to be like this.

Sometimes I pray. Don't look so shocked, I pray. I start out by asking God for His help and guidance, but I usually end up beating my fists in the pillow covers, asking: Why me, God? Why? What terrible sin have I done to deserve this kind of existence?

Christmas Glow # 2 Thankful woman

This Christmas is so different from any I've seen so far. Oh, I've always loved the holidays and everything that goes with it; the warmth, the love shining in all the faces you meet, families gathering around a table to break bread together...

Family has always been important to me. My family is far from perfect. (chuckle) Oh, I could tell you a few stories... but the Christmas holiday always brings me back to the core - back to the reason we celebrate.

And this Christmas even more so. My daughter, Sadie turned twelve last spring. It was a few weeks before her birthday that the fevers started - low grade fevers, along with joint and muscle aches. I wasn't overly concerned at first. Her doctor told us it was likely some weird virus that would run its course and be gone in a couple weeks. But it didn't. It took several more weeks and trips to the doctor, and then several more doctors, until we finally found out what was wrong. When they announced her diagnosis, I was in shock. Sadie has leukemia. I couldn't believe it - no cancer history in either of our families, she had been a perfectly healthy child. "Why?" was the first thing I asked. Why Sadie?

Sadie's illness and treatment has turned our lives upside down. I can speak intelligently to you about all kinds of subjects I knew nothing about before: Hospitals. Bone-marrow biopsies. Chemotherapy. Potential donors. Pediatric Hematologists. Radiation Oncologists. Prognosis'. Medical bills have pushed us way beyond our limits.

I think that before her diagnosis, I just took so many things for granted. When something like this comes along, it wakes you up - forces you to look at life from a slightly different angle.

Sadie is home for Christmas. She has made gains, but we are far from being out of the woods. We are praying for remission - for her healing. I am so proud of her - of how brave she has been.

So, as I said, I'm looking at Christmas a little differently this year. I have been a Christ-follower for many years. I don't know how I would have gotten through these past several months without my faith. But it struck me recently - a simple truth really, but it struck me like a ton of bricks. God gave us His Son - His dearly loved and only Son. (pause - then slowly/deliberately) He gave us His Son.

Honestly, I can't stop thinking about that. In my prayers I am just overwhelmed by the thought. I just keep asking: Why God? Why me? What have I ever done to merit the precious, sacrificial gift of Your Son?