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Katie Langston 00:59

Hello, everyone and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host Katie Langston. You know, there are a lot of expectations this time of year. And well that creates anticipation and can be part of the fun of the holidays. It can also mean disappointment and sorrow. Especially if we're dealing with loss, heartbreak, faith crisis, mental illness or physical ailments, then Christmas can just be plain old hard. This is a message for folks who can relate to that. When I was growing up, Christmas meant joy, magic, music and laughter. I imagined it means that to lots of children, but my father is particularly good at it. He embodies the Christmas Spirit, the way he recites the Grinch in his convincing British accent. He tells us every year about the Christmas Eve and his boyhood when he woke to discover one of Santa's elves snooping around his bedroom. How he cries every time Scrooge pledges to really change. Or Clarence the angel gets his wings. I'll never forget the year the ward went around doing video interviews with families about their Christmas traditions which were made into a video montage and played at the annual Christmas party. Everyone else had perfectly respectable traditions, Christmas lights, recipes, favorite songs. But when it came time for the Ackermans portion of the movie bad had made everyone get all dressed up in bed sheets with towels on our heads. Acting out the scene when the angels come to announce the birth of Christ to the shepherds. He'd made a sing, "Angels We Have Heard on High" in four part harmony. My little sister was standing on the piano bench with her arm outstretched shouting, "Fear not for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!" Everyone else's clips were 32nd descriptions of their holiday traditions. While ours was a five minute plus demonstration. As a teenager, I can tell you that it was the most embarrassing moment of my life. Still, I carried with me a sense of the joyous and spectacular about Christmas. I couldn't remember a single unhappy Christmas in all my life. Until a few years ago when God gave me a new glimpse into this Holiday of Holidays.

Katie Langston 03:25

2010 was something of a rough year for me. I dove headfirst into a grueling battle with my own version of what Paul called, "a thorn in the flesh." We all have our thorns, nagging, sometimes agonizing reminders of our fallen state. It could be depression, anxiety or mental illness, sins and temptations we can't seem to shake. Addictions, difficult childhoods, physical impairments or ailments. Coming to accept and work within our limitations is an important healing process. But the truth is that when you engage in this sort of work, you often feel worse before you feel better. 2010 was the worst I had ever

felt. Christmas was hard. I'd had hard times before of course, but I'd always been able to keep them to myself with a determined smile and a deliberate upward inflection in my voice. Christmas had always been a welcome distraction from my worries, but that year I couldn't muster it. I was struggling so deeply that I could no longer hide it from my family and friends. I was reading in First Nephi chapter 11 which contains Nephi's vision of the tree of life. An angel appears to Nephi and Nephi asks the angel what the beautiful tree means. In response Nephi is shown a vision of a virgin bearing a son and a stable after Nephi sees this the angel asks, "Nowest thou the meaning of the tree which my father saw?" And Nephi answers "Yeah, it is the love of God which shed itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men." I asked myself why? Why did Nephi understand that the tree was the love of God after he saw Jesus being born. And then, just a few verses later, the angel exclaimed to behold the condescension of God. Now condescension means to come down from a high place to a much lower place. I realized that the love of God isn't best manifest in his might and glory and creation and dominion, though. It is expressed there too, of course, but in his humility, his empathy, his willingness to get down into the dirt with us. After discovering this, I recorded some of my thoughts and feelings. This is a portion of what I wrote, "For all the lights and tinsel for all the sparkling packages and clanking bells for all the Hallelujah choruses, the decadent food, the elaborate parties, the ugly sweaters with sequins and snowmen and swirls. We are honoring the birth of a God who ultimately came to suffer and in his sufferings triumph. That's not to say the triumph doesn't deserve the joy and gaiety we lavish upon it. Merely that this year, I need to focus on the humility of his beginning and the depth of his condescension so lowly, so meek, that he came to meet me where I am. So to the God born in a barn, not in a palace, not in a hospital, not even a clean bed, and laid to sleep in a feeding trough, thank you. You have no beauty that I should desire you, you who are smitten and afflicted, bruised and forsaken. And yet I do from the depths of my soul, I do." Now, five years later, I'm through the worst of that particular battle. Though, as is the case with our thorns in the flesh, I may never be fully rid of it. Christmas this year is as much about trumpets and tinsel and joy as it ever was. But there's a tenderness about it, and I hope about me, it was not there before. A clearer understanding, a deeper well of compassion and empathy, the pure love of Christ. There's a popular Christmas Carol. "Oh, come All Ye Faithful" but I wonder if we might not be able to expand it. Oh, come all ye faithful. Oh, come all ye doubtful. Come All Ye sorrowful and shameful and prideful and sinful. Come lay your burdens at his feet. Come take part of the condescension of Christ. You are never so low, but that he has gone lower. You are never so lost, but that he will seek you out. May we all have a very Merry Christmas.

Katie Langston 08:20

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