

Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

Keep it Real During Advent

Sarah Reinhard

Hi there. I'm Sarah Reinhard, and we're here today to talk about keeping it real during Advent. Are you ready? Alright. Let's start with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, you know the burden we bear. Not only do we have the wonderful gift of your Son coming up at Christmas, but we have the preparation time. Help us to see that as the wonderful burden it is, and to embrace it joyfully, and to keep things real. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Oh my goodness, Advent is enough to make me want to crawl in the fetal position, curl into a fetal position and crawl away and hide for 4 weeks. I used to say that I hated Christmas, and my husband always corrected me and said "You don't hate Christmas." And he's right. I really don't hate Christmas. I hate the hype. I hate the commercialization. I hate that Christmas, for much of the world, is not about Christmas. And I hate all the stuff. I mean, yeah, I'm a big wimp, and I totally can go off the deep end. So for Advent to be anything close to enjoyable, for it to be a spiritual experience, I need to keep things real. And I'm betting I'm not the only one. How do you keep things real during Advent? Please do let me know at some point, because I'm always looking for tips. And Advent is supposed to be a penitential season. It's supposed to be a time for us to prepare for this great feast. And a baby is being born. Our savior is coming. And it happens every year, and it's this incredibly exciting, wonderful, super-great thing, and yet we turn it into way more. I try and do 17 million things, I set the bar so high that I can never reach it. Do you do that? Is it just me? Okay, maybe it's not just me.

So, I have 4 tips for keeping things real during Advent as we prepare for the coming of the Lord. And trying to observe it as a season that's proper in its own right, and not just a whirlwind of activity during what the world calls the Christmas season. Actually, the Christmas season starts at the vigil mass on December 24th. That's when Christmas, the Christmas season appropriately starts. Now, I know, you're going to see decked halls way before December 24th. You're probably even

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going to put up your Christmas tree before then. And I can't even keep my own family from putting it up before about the third week of Advent, but I really have to fight to keep them from wanting to put it up like the day after Thanksgiving. And it's okay. If you are one of those people who puts up your tree the day after Thanksgiving, that's okay. Totally okay. For me, it adds stress. But I think it's important to understand about yourself what your stress level is, and the kinds of things that will put you over the edge and make you go from embracing the season and what it means, to turning away from it. And by turning away from the season, in some ways we turn away from God, right. We're preparing for the birth of His Son. But if we get ourselves so stressed about it, and we get ourselves so wrapped up in details that truly don't matter, we're not really accomplishing that preparation that we need to be accomplishing.

Alright. The first way to keep it real during Advent: Try a new devotion now. If your name is Sarah Reinhard – that would be me – if your name is Sarah Reinhard, don't make that new devotion something impossible. If the thought of praying a Rosary makes you want to curl up and die, don't make a Rosary. Maybe try a new devotion that's very simple. For example, you might decide at 3 PM every day that you're going to pray Divine Mercy Chaplet. Now, if that sounds intimidating, let me insure you: 9 minutes. I clocked myself praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet. 9 minutes. And actually you could probably make it faster if you're *brrr*, doing that. But, can you set aside x number of minutes a day, let's call it 9 minutes, can you set aside 9 minutes a day to try a new devotion? Something that will stretch you a little bit, but that also is one thing?

Maybe it will be a prayer after meals with your family. For my family, that doesn't necessarily work, because we have basketball season in December in addition to everything else, right. We have sports. What's the world thinking? But there is a way. Maybe when you get in the car and you get ready to go somewhere, you can pray a special prayer during Advent, just remind everybody in your car that it's Advent. Whatever it is, try a new devotion. Involve your family, make it your own, try one new devotion. And I'm going to actually throw this out there. For those of you who have families and have a tendency to hear this and go "Okay, I've got to try a new devotion with my 11 year old, I've got to try a new devotion with my 9 year old, I've got to..." No, no, no, no, no. Try a new devotion. One thing. I know, sometimes it's harder to do less than to plan to do more, but let my experience speak to you. Try one. Next year you can try 2. This year, let's try one.

Alright. So, after you try your new devotion, here's the other way to keep things real during Advent. You ready? You're going to bless those ordinary and mundane

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tasks. Now, what does it mean to bless something? Do you have an idea of what that means? Blessing something means you're turning yourself to God while you're doing it. So for me, one of the ordinary and mundane tasks that never ends in my life, well there are 2 of them. One is laundry. There is always laundry to wash, there is always laundry to fold, and there is always laundry to put away. This is the reality of my life. Many people's lives actually. And I don't really particularly mind laundry to be honest. But how can I bless that time? Well, during Advent, I can take these tasks I have to do anyway – folding laundry would be my example, or putting away, or even putting it in the washer I guess. Any of those laundry-related tasks, that's going to be my example. What I might do is pray a Hail Mary as I'm folding, or pray whatever part of a Rosary I can get done in the time I have to do this task. I can turn that time into almost a prayer chapel, right. A little mental place I go while I'm doing this mundane task. Maybe I just have a conversation with God about the difficulties, this person or that person. Maybe it's a time when I offer prayers for other people. But I can bless those ordinary tasks. Maybe it's doing dishes, or maybe it's making dinner, or driving somewhere. Bless those ordinary and mundane tasks in your life. Turn to God, however briefly, however scattered you may feel during those ordinary and mundane tasks, and make them a time that's special. I guess that defeats the purpose of them being ordinary and mundane tasks, doesn't it?

The third way to keep it real during Advent is to use art. Now, Advent, and the Christmas season to the rest of the world, is a great time for art, because you'll see beautiful things everywhere. You might see light displays, you might be able to get books from the library that have beautiful religious art in them – you can also look those up online. But I have found when I use beautiful art, I can pray in a different way. Even just the appreciation of that beautiful artwork is a prayer, or can be a prayer. So use art to inspire you. Now, Christmas time, and I'm using the Christmas time in the secular sense – actually it's Advent time – there's beautiful music, and music is also an art form. Listening to some of these beautiful music selections that are available can be a way to really lift your mind and heart to God, and to prepare for the coming of His Son. And how hard is it to put on beautiful music? Not Christmas carols. Don't get me wrong, I'm talking about art, like something that really and truly lifts your mind and heart to God. Okay, maybe it can be Christmas carols. I guess you have to determine what that word art means to you. What will lift your heart and mind to God. That's one way to keep it real during Advent, because art turns us to God, or can. It can. He made it. He made us love beauty. Beauty brings us closer to him. So, use that, and prepare for the coming of His Son.

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Alright. So, so far we have: Try a new devotion, bless the ordinary and mundane tasks, use art. Number 4 is to keep it simple. And I think this is a theme I've been sharing throughout all of my tips. But I want to just take a moment just to outline that. Keep it simple. Don't overcomplicate it. It's all too easy to turn Advent into the biggest stressor of your life. And there's already a lot of stress this time of year. Don't do that. Keep it simple. Pick one thing. Pick half a thing if that's easier. Or just whatever that means to you. What does simple mean to you? How does keeping it simple look to you? It's something that you almost have to look inside and determine, and pray about it. Listen for God's voice answering you in that. Usually with me, his voice is through other people, so someone close to me will say "You know, I think you're trying to do too much", and I will respond every time "Oh no, no, no, I'm not trying to do too much. Why would you think that?" And then later I'll think "You know, maybe I'm trying to do too much, and that person was pointing it out, and maybe that was God's voice." I'm pretty thick-skulled though. I hope you're not as thick-skulled as I am. So, let's recap. 4 ways to keep it simple this Advent. I said it wrong. 4 ways to keep it real this Advent. First, try a new devotion. Second, bless the ordinary and mundane moments in your life. Third, use art. And fourth, keep it simple.

I'm hoping and praying that your Advent is full of many, many blessings, and that on Christmas your heart overflows with the joy that is the newborn savior. Let's end with a prayer, shall we. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, thank you for the gift of your Son. As we prepare this Advent, please help us to keep in mind whatever you would want us to keep in mind. Help us to hear your small, still voice, even in the noise that's all around us. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.