

Is that jingle bells, or a horde of wildebeests?

When your halls are decked with existential dread.

As the end of the year draws near, I can almost feel the rumble of the approaching stampede in my chest. If I put my ear to the ground, my heart begins to race… I hear what's coming.

My body remembers that the end of the year tends to feel chaotic and difficult. Expenses skyrocket.

- My flesh aches to provide what culture tells me makes a magical holiday season (pumpkins, turkeys, and Christmas trees, oh my!) and to conquer what feels like an impossible to-do list before the clock strikes midnight and I turn into a pumpkin myself.

I struggle to sleep as I think about every square in the calendar beginning to fill up. I think about my newly adult children and the big decisions they are making. (Some I agree with. Some I don't.) I wonder if my high schooler can turn his grades around in time for finals. I worry about him because he seems sad, and it is so hard to get him to talk.

Perhaps your mind is as busy as mine and your end-of-year calendar might already be filling up too, but I have a feeling it's not just the things written on it that are taking up space in your head. I imagine there are people you're worried about or circumstances you wish you could change.

- Perhaps you're at a loss trying to figure out how to help someone you love, or carrying something you can't fix no matter how many times you turn it over in your mind.
- You probably have your own version of what keeps you awake at night and even follows you into your day.

Personally, the weight of that makes me feel split in so many directions, and I don't really feel like I'm knocking it out of the park in any part of my life. I worry, I make lists, and before I can strike a single thing off said list, I've added three more.

While I'm mulling all this over, my other teen sits at the dining room table where I'm working alongside my three-times-microwaved cup of coffee, trying to connect with me.

- I glance over my computer screen and answer him in short automated responses before turning back to work. (IYKYK). "Wow! That's awesome. Totally. So cool!"
- I'm totally distracted with worrying about the people I love, but I can't stop long enough to pay attention to and love the person who is sitting right in front of me.

I decide to give up on my coffee, dump it into the sink, and start over. I listen to the Keurig whine, hiss, gurgle, and choke (is it supposed to sound like that??) as it spits out my terrible-tasting, yet incredibly convenient, second cup. I lean against the counter.

And the words of an old hymn find their way onto my lips.

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er;
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!

Something in my chest softens.
I pray. I ask Jesus for help.
With what? I don't know.
All of it.

I remember Philippians 4:6–7:
"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Then I ask Alexa to tell me verses about peace.
Don't judge me. This is where I am.

She reads several, but I barely hear them because one line from the hymn keeps lingering in my mind.

- ***I'm so glad I learned to trust Him.***

It occurs to me that almost everything consuming my mind is something I have very little control over. As I stand there with my coffee, another name for Jesus comes to mind.

Wonderful Counselor. "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

- I've heard Isaiah 9:6 my entire life, but I wonder how often I've treated Wonderful Counselor as an invitation to actually let Him counsel me…because I spend an awful lot of time trying to be the counselor, all while THE Wonderful Counselor is right there.

So…I ask Him to counsel me:

- Teach me to trust You.
- Give me discernment about what is mine to do and what is mine to release.
- Show me how to love people. Help me recognize the difference between faithful action and anxious striving…
- …And maybe help me be present enough to look over my computer screen when my kid wants to talk to me.

Nothing around me immediately changes, but with a deep release of my breath, I remember that God is who He says He is.

As we head into the months ahead, counseling is a theme worth reflecting on more often.
Not the need for a perfectly organized calendar or the ability to anticipate every problem and meet every need. Maybe a moment to reflect each day where we remember to trust in Jesus, our Wonderful Counselor.