

Shalom in our shattered lives

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I think it was when Facebook was [messaging with our minds](#), seeing if they could toy with our emotions ([they could](#)), when I read research that said that people were happier on Friday than they were on the weekend. They had scoured statuses and found out what was already known—people, generally, love the longing for something more than they do the actuality of that something.

People love [planning a vacation](#) more than the actual travel.

The building sexual tension in a TV show is better than when the couple actually gets together.

The messed up life reflected in a memoir is fascinating—until the person sobers up and grows up.

The dream of creating a piece of art or writing is much more exciting than finishing that inevitably imperfect work.

The planning, longing, and hope—I suppose that's how I've learned to think of Christmas. When I was a kid, I would madly dash into the living room on Christmas morning. I was the youngest child by many years, so my siblings were in a teen stupor, wanting to sleep until noon, while I bounced on the couch in anticipation for 6:00 a.m. to see if the whims on my list had been fulfilled.

Then, as I grew older, I began to shift my focus on what other people desired. Could I purchase the perfect gift? Could I make them happy, even for a sparkling second? I couldn't wait for that look of rapture when they tore open the present.

Now, it's all a bit more complicated, especially during this Advent season, when the news is full of brutality, retaliation, and torture.

And it's not just the national news, my personal relationships feel riddled with grief. I can't go into it all because it's only my sorrow as I'm one degree removed. Marriages fall apart. A family mourns the death of a son. Work anxiety looms. I watch friends suffer, and I long. And my gut is yearning for something much deeper than a restful weekend, a pair of roller skates, or even to buy the perfect gifts for my loved ones.

As I anticipate the coming Christ, I'm trying to find the beauty in the yearning—as it comes out in so many different ways. We protest with throngs of people. We dream for peace. We weep over torture revelations. We miss loved ones who have died. And, particularly in this season, I'm reminded that God is with us, even in the midst of the headline news, our loss, and our sorrow.

Christmas is more complicated now, with its layers of meaning. Joy can no longer be wrapped up with a tidy bow. But, for me, this year, since I cannot have the world as it ought to be, I'm determined to find beauty in the yearning. I will sing with those who keep lighting candles, knowing that [darkness cannot drive out darkness](#). And when we see things that have hidden in the shadowy corners of our society, I protest with those who refuse to yield for nihilism. We will rise up from our depression. We will keep dreaming of shalom in our shattered lives. We will claim that God is with us—because there rests our hope and our longing.