

Dear Friends,

Happy 2021! Here we are almost halfway through the year, and things are still a bit rough. It seems like some of us hoped that once the bell struck midnight on January 1, the new year would be magical, or at least not as bad as 2020. In some ways, things are better, and in other ways we have simply learned to deal with the difficulties. 2020 held some wonderful things, too, and pushed us into areas we never expected.

My word for this past year has been *growth*. Typically, we don't grow unless we are challenged, and we have all seen our fair share of challenges this last year. I'd like to say I excelled in all those areas, but I didn't. There were plenty of times I sat crying over a bag of Oreos. Other times I cried out to God with what felt like emptiness. The sweet times were when God whispered back to me, and I was at peace. I saw God's heart in the way others loved and cared for me. I saw His grace when I got mad for the umpteenth time. I was reassured in His path for me when I saw families coming together to worship. How have you grown this year? How have you seen God work in the life of your community? Sometimes, tunnel vision caused by grief makes it challenging to see, but if you pause and look, you'll see it.

As I take time to pause and look back, here are some of the areas of growth I've experienced.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

We were able to move back into full-time ministry last September. Our numbers started strong and have stayed that way. Since starting back, I've had more kids during Sunday School than I've ever had! It has been amazing to see. We separate the kids into family pods and give them their own basket of supplies. They are truly resilient and run with any changes that we make along the way. I have embraced the theme of "Love God, Love Others," which is not always the easiest but it's what has been commanded of us.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY

This last year, I took on a leadership role in our women's ministry. The



original leader was moving and there was no one willing to step into it. I knew that I couldn't run two different ministries well, so I opted to team up with two of our chaplains' wives. These ladies have been fantastic! They have encouraged, pushed, and supported me throughout the past year.

Looking at our group, we saw the need for community and rest. Every mom walked in weary, and we wanted to help. We put together our first women's retreat with the help of other Cadence ladies. I took on the role of director and watched these other leaders live out their gifts in truly remarkable ways. From teaching, worship, hospitality, and pastoral care, our ladies were seen and loved. One lady, who was invited by a friend, came to see Christ as

her Savior, and sought a relationship with Him. It was a blessing to be a part of that process, to see her heart soften over the weekend and watch the other ladies support her. Now her whole family faithfully comes to chapel each Sunday, and they have dived into our community!

I stepped into the role of teaching which, as a certified teacher, shouldn't sound that difficult. However, this time I was teaching adults. . . way scarier! I fought with many insecurities as I wrote and led a study on grief. I have grown in my understanding of grief over the last few years and have seen many people struggle with it. We all face loss in different aspects of life, but we don't always take the time to deal with it in healthy ways. I hoped to provide some tools and space for our ladies to



process. The cool thing was that they took it home and shared it with their families. Some even asked for extra homework to give to their husbands. I can't help but think about the story of the loaves and fishes. The disciples brought the little that they had, and Jesus multiplied it in ways beyond their imagination. That's how I have felt about this role. I don't bring much, but I know God takes my willingness and grows it. He doesn't ask for perfection—He just asks us to bring what we have to Him in humility, and He does the rest.

TECHNOLOGY

I'm going to be honest here—using video technology to communicate is difficult for me. My anxiety goes THROUGH THE ROOF when you put me in front of a camera.

However, this is the way much of our world communicates these days, and it has opened many doors that we previously didn't know existed. I had the opportunity to share via video with a second-grade class about what it means to be a missionary. Afterward, they sent me cards saying how they had prayed for me—so cute!

My teammate, Matthew, has jumped in fully with technology and has done amazing things with it. He has started a channel called "Bible Story Time," which is aimed at going through the Bible from the beginning and covering the basics in a family-friendly style. It is great even for adults who might not have a strong understanding of how God's rescue plan is weaved throughout the whole Bible, so check him out on YouTube!

WAYS TO PRAY IN THE COMING MONTHS

Vacation Bible School: We are back to in-person VBS this year! Woohoo! It'll be a smaller scale, but we'll get to have more intentional time with kids and volunteers. We wrote our own curriculum this year to focus on the needs of the military child. Pray for the volunteers and families who will be participating June 30–July 2.

Restrictions: Currently, Okinawa is under a state of emergency. This means cases have risen and hospitals are filling up. The Marine Corps population has remained steady with most people vaccinated, but much of the Japanese population has yet to be vaccinated. Please pray for the health and safety of our neighbors. The U.S. military is experiencing various levels of restrictions. People are tired and want to travel to visit family, but that is currently difficult to do. Please pray for grace for our community and their families as they continue navigating this season.

Thank you for your prayers for my travels. I was recently able to surprise my family with a visit. I got to spend Mother's Day with my mom for the first time in over five years!

It's amazing to see that in this most challenging year, I've been the most encouraged. Thank you to those who have reached out through email and cards. It is a blessing to have many people caring for me.

Love,
Sarah



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