



Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. You're listening to episode 4 of Praise Through It.

(soft guitar interlude)

If you've ever gotten stuck in the mire of the daily grind, or if you've ever wondered, *will this ever be better? Will this ever be different?* this might be a space for you. Based on Philippians 4:8, we're going to practice seeing the praiseworthy side of our daily struggles. I'll offer a perspective that shifts our eyes from that daily grind, those daily struggles, to seeing the beauty in the mess, the order through the chaos, the glimmer of hope that inevitably shines. If that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.

(soft guitar interlude)



Strange we never prize the music
Till the sweet voiced bird is flown!
Strange that we should slight the violets
Till the lovely flowers are gone!
Strange that summer skies and sunshine
Never seem one half so fair,
As when winter's snowy pinions
Shake the white down in the air.

That's Hymn 174 from a Consolidated Gospel Hymnal published in 1883. The hymn itself, titled Scatter Seeds of Kindness, was actually written in 1870. 151 years ago, a woman named Mary R. Smith was in the same spot as me: wishing she had soaked up the sun just a wee bit more while it was still shining, so that in these dark, gray days of winter I could easily conjure up the feelings the sunshine gives me.

If you live somewhere like my hometown, you expect monotone gray between December and April. It's what our brains have been trained to expect based on centuries of known weather patterns, so when the sun shines anywhere in this time, we are delightfully surprised. In spring and summer, we're delighted but in an expected way. Of course the sun is shining May through September, that's what it's supposed to do, right?

There are seasons in our life when we expect light. It is counted on and planned for and maybe even basked in for a little while. Milestones like certain birthdays and graduations. Getting married, pregnancy, the birth of a child, certain seasons of marriage, certain seasons of a career. Light dances easily in and around our lives, and we are grateful.

There are other seasons in our life when we kind of expect stress. A change looming on the horizon, an uncertainty you know you'll be carrying for awhile, raising multiple children at one time, under the same roof -- you know it's going to be worth it, and you know that for a while you're going to be in the trenches and it's going to be somethin'.

Well, what happens when the seasons get mixed up? When you were expecting light and instead we are swallowed by darkness? What then? Where do we go with our grief? Our fear? And our frustration, anger, and confusion?



It was 2007. I was one year into military spouse life and southern living, two things I was still sure I knew absolutely nothing about. What I did know, though, was that our first military station of Savannah, Georgia, was a blessed and beloved place by our Lord Jesus because the sun shines there *all the time*. All the time, guys. So much so that I had to have a conversation with myself about whether or not it was okay to be sitting inside on a sunny Saturday in February watching reruns of *The Office*. Of course it was okay, but where I come from, the sun is a rare jewel in February. I had to get used to the constant sunlight. Not that it took me too long, but still, it was a season when I expected gray and instead got light. Oodles and oodles of it.

From Savannah, I went to Japan for a short while where the sun also shines more often than not. After that was Ohio, which more closely resembled my hometown. The one full winter we spent there, there was a 45 day stretch--a straight 45 days--with no sun. I'm not talking like, Alaska, beautiful mountains and only one or two hours of sunlight during winter. I just mean gray, as far as the eye can see, for 45 days. I'm sure you can hear how happy this made me. I was so desperate, I bought a HappyLight lamp. Capital H, capital L. Have you seen those? It is supposed to do for your brain what sunlight does. I'm not sure it really worked, I kind of maybe acted like it did. I honestly don't remember.

But I do know that after Ohio, God smiled on us again and we landed back in the southeast, in North Carolina. For nine glorious years we soaked up the sun all year round. We laughed at our people up in New York who were all bundled up in December and January while we swept pine needles from the deck. We had breakfast and game board picnics in all seasons. We played baseball, frisbee, and soccer in our front yard all year round.

And it is a good thing we did because the end of 2020 found us living right back in our hometown area where the sun is in pretty short supply this time of year. We're homeschooling right now and my daughter has started drawing rainbows in the cloudy column on her calendar sheet each morning in an act of quiet, creative rebellion. Rainbow on, sister. I get it, I really do.

This winter season, my first back up here in 15 years, the first day I remember being struck by the oddity of the sun shining in the sky was actually the day after Winter Solstice. The day after the darkest day of the year, the sun came out. The day after the least amount of sunlight for the entire year, the light shined. And from that day on, the daylight has been lasting longer. Second by second, minute by minute, moment by moment. LIGHT.

I have taken more pictures of the sun and the blue sky in the last eight weeks than I have in probably the last 2 years. And I get really excited when I see that our solar light posts we have in the front and back- yards have some light in them after nightfall. Because that means that day, the sun was shining in the sky, in front of the clouds.

I thought about that for awhile, about how when the light surprises us in a season of darkness it seems to shine brighter. The reverse is also true: when darkness surprises us in a season of light, it hits harder. We expect the sun to be shining and then an eclipse swoops in and changes everything. It doesn't feel fair. It doesn't feel right. And we don't know where to go with how we feel. Should we power through the darkness, unafraid of whatever might hit us on the way? That seems reckless. Should we shrink into a ball, head down, waiting for the darkness to pass? Well, that can make it feel like the darkness will never end.



Darkness tends to be where we doubt.
Light tends to be where we believe.
Dark tends to be where we cower.
Light tends to be where we stand strong.

But the thing is, light is not guaranteed in any specific season. We act like it is because of our own expectations and mixed messages we get from all over the place. Sometimes those expectations are fair. The plans *should* pan out based on all the information you have at the time.

But sometimes... a diagnosis interrupts an otherwise healthy, active life like it did for us 2002 and it threatens to shake up two kids who really depend on their daddy. An early, extended deployment interrupts newlywed life like it did for us in 2007 when it was announced on my husband's 24th birthday. A job doesn't come as easily as we thought it should have, like it happened for us in 2012, and unemployment becomes a daily challenger of your spouse's identity. A birth doesn't go as planned like it happened for us in 2015, and life and death are mingled in the overnight hours while doctors work fast and furious to make sure life wins. A pandemic and a furlough change some big plans like they did for us, and millions around the globe, in 2020.

Whatever dark season you're thinking of, it is some kind of bomb that drops and it changes everything you knew to be true from that moment on.

Still, one thing is always sure, which we found in every season: eventually, the light. It shows itself. Sometimes it peeks out like it's shy. Sometimes it's bold and bright and unapologetic.

Honestly, I'll take it in any form, shy or bold. Faint or bright. In the background or loud and proud up front.

Let us remember that we would not know light unless we knew darkness. We would not know sunshine unless we knew the shadows. The darkness exists, this is true. The light does too. And just like the darkness comes to an end-- each and every morning, each and every season-- so, too, will the light arrive. We can go from grief to grace. From fear to faith. From dark to light.

Until then, while we're in the thick of it, we look for the light where we can. We look for the bursts of color that offer hope, a reminder that what is now will not always be. And when we can't see it and we feel like we can't even look for it, we activate our faith filter. We do what Author Tsh Oxenrider says in her Advent devotional book *Shadow & Light*. She talks about faith being "an ongoing, inward practice of letting go, of choosing to believe even when we're not sure it makes sense. It reminds us that we're made to have faith, because otherwise our good God would have displayed all life's answers before us."

That last part is my favorite. We were *meant* to have faith. That's what I want to take away from the dark seasons. We were *meant* for this. We don't want to be meant for it, we want a different story. But we were meant to have faith, which means we were meant to go through the dark, and that means we're meant to come into the light.

Just like those 45 days of gray in Ohio, eventually the light comes out. Eventually, the warmth comes back. Eventually, those sun rays dance in our living room again. We have to put sunglasses back on because it gets so bright. The light arrives in all its glory.

When darkness surprises you in a season when you were expecting joy and light, may you remember that an ever-loving God is there to light your path as you put your trust in him, and when you feel like you're stumbling through the dark, may you keep the faith, believing that eventually, the light *will* arrive.



I know there are a million metaphors and examples we could talk about when it comes to dark vs. light, sun vs. shade. This is what I chose today. To remember that eventually: the light. When it's so dark I can't see, I'll remember that eventually, the light will arrive. When my heart is wilted and tired, I know that the light will bring it back to life. May it be so for you, as well.

Life can be messy and chaotic and hard, and we can see that side, and we can find the glimmers of light that shine through our everyday. No rose-colored glasses, but true things that bring hope and joy and peace.



I love connecting here with you every two weeks. If you ever want to connect beyond your speakers or earbuds, I'm mostly on Instagram as myself, Elisa Preston. You can also find me at elisapreston.com, where you'll find more about my books, speaking at your event, and some fun

extras. I also love one-to-one chats, if you ever want to say hi or tell me about something an episode made you think of, you can send a message to hello@elisapreston.com - I'm always up for that. I've created public playlists on both Spotify and Apple Music if you'd like a Praise Through It podcast to go along with this podcast. If you'd like a soundtrack to go about your day, just search the title of this podcast, Praise Through It, on either app under their Playlist feature.



Today I'm going to leave you with a quote from Emily P. Freeman, author and host of The Next Right podcast and book. In her Instagram stories every Sunday night she does a reflection of her previous week. The final quote from two Sundays ago struck me, and I wanted to share it with you: These are the days of coming to terms with what we've lost, making sideways peace with what remains, and continuing to trust our friend Jesus even in the shadows. Even in the dark. (And I'm going to add my own words at the end: even until, and even still after, the light arrives). Amen.

I'll see you next time for episode 5 of Praise Through It.

