

*Winter is the time of strengthening*



When I was young, winter was wonderful. It seemed colder then than it is now, yet I enjoyed it immensely. It was a white play land, often filled with hours of delight. As soon as there was enough snow, we'd call each other on our 13-party phone line (no one had a private phone line around us!), and word would spread that we were going sledding in the cow pasture. That cow pasture was our "Disney World" in the 1940's. Raised at a small Indiana lake, we made up our own recreation. We lived miles from town, all of our families had but one car, and we were content with our made-up games. Who could forget Hide and Seek, Cowboys and Indians, "tent" and having a store indoors on rainy days, mud-pies in swimsuits in the summers along with swimming and fishing, ice skating in the winter, including crack the whip and hockey with sticks pulled out of the ice's thinner edges, and finally the exhilaration of sledding down the hill in the neighbor's cow pasture.

Those of us who lived there year round thought we were the REAL owners of Nyona Lake. We were certain that all those summer residents who lived in the big cities in another house in winter were nothing more than "city slickers." We were the true residents of "our" lake.

When that first snow would cover our little world, we'd be bundled up to our eyeballs by our mothers, leggings, scarves, hats, boots, mittens - - and we would waddle outdoors, grab our sleds and head to the fence for that pasture. We'd heave our sleds over the fence, then climb over it ourselves, more than once tearing holes in our leggings and winter coats. But once we reached that open cow pasture with the huge hill for sledding, we had arrived at Wonderland!

We would slide for simply hours on end. We raced one another, we tried rolling off halfway down. One of my favorite things was for all of us (that would be a grand total of about 6 ragamuffins!) would line up at the top of the hill, and all take off at the same time. I distinctly remember one time when the snow got capped with freezing rain, then the temperature dropped so far that none of us were able to climb the hill to slide down. You couldn't even make a dent in the snow to get back up the hill! We finally opted to cling to that old wire fence and painstakingly drag our sleds by ropes as we made our way hand over hand back up.

That particular day my little brother Noel and I were the first there and the first ones down. We decided to race towards the swamp of saplings that lay well past the bottom of the hill. We had never even come close to those trees because they were so far beyond the end of the hill. But that day with the surface as hard as the frozen lake, we literally flew down that hill and were screaming towards the swamp saplings. Soon sensing that instead of slowing down as we neared the end of the hill, my speed was still 110 miles per hour, I yelled to Noel to roll off the sled. Being younger than I, he was scared to, so he just rode that sled all the way on until He crashed with an awful bang into a tree. He hurt himself, broke his sled, and went home crying. I saved my sled but hurt my shoulder because the ice was so hard! Ah, winter! Wasn't it wonderful in those days?

I'm sure you're well aware that the natural world speaks to us often of what God is doing in the realm of the spirit. Many years have come and gone since my childhood. Many winters have come and gone – and I have grown up – and lived life – and had a few other experiences.

I have experienced some winters in my spiritual life. They have been cold – freezing – long on darkness and short on light. They have been something very different than those idyllic winters I wrote of from my youth. It has taken me awhile, but I think I'm beginning to learn what this is all about.

As a child, I didn't think about seasons. I simply loved them all. But neither did I understand what God was doing in the natural during seasons. I only played on the surface of the earth, if you will.

So let's consider for a moment what is actually taking place in natural, earthly winters. In winter, growing things rest; their time of productive living is stopped for awhile. They are being restored. They have closed up shop, as it were (leaves falling off trees, blossoms ceasing to be seen), and are hidden or barricaded (like irises under the soil) for a season. Lakes freeze over, fields completely shut down from green growth.

But underneath all this seeming barrenness, this frozen land that appears to be a wasteland, God is at work. He is strengthening the earth through apparent inaction; He is renewing the soil; he is patiently and with great wisdom healing and restoring the earth. And in the fullness of time, this season will be completed and Spring will come.

Spring, the season of renewal. Spring, the season of new life. Spring, the season of resurrection. Spring – flows from winter. Spring waters have their source in winter snow.



And this is the whole point I want to make in this little musing.

All of us will experience spiritual winters in our lives. In God's economy, there are a couple of reasons why we may find ourselves in a spiritual winter. First, it may be self-induced. We may have wondered

from the Lord, from the Fountain of Living Water. This will always lead to drought, to spiritual winter. Secondly, God may be preparing us for a new season of intimacy with Him. This is usually preceded by a time of preparation, a spiritual “winter.” These experiences are usually not really pleasant, but rather challenge us to our very core.

How do you handle winter, then? First of all, remember that the Lord is the Lord of all Seasons, and that His passionate love for you has no season. It is always there. His desire for you is always good, and no matter in what season you find Yourself, He is there with you, wanting to bless you.

I would encourage you to go to Him in prayer and ask Him to search you and know you. Ask Him if there is anything in you that has caused a self-imposed winter. Ask Him to speak to your heart. He will. If He shows you something, deal with it; if you need to repent, repent. If He does not show you that, then I would feel confident that He is preparing you for a wonderful new season.

So what do I do when I find myself in a winter of preparation? Surrender. Surrender. Surrender. Yield to His touch. You may well find yourself really tried. Rejoice! as He sees you as worthy of His love and affection. I would encourage you to be content in this season. Pray as you can. I remind you that not all prayer need be verbal. Sometimes a look between lovers says it all. Stay close to Him and trust Him. He is transforming you from silver to gold, or maybe from bronze to gold. Be comforted in knowing He is preparing you for a new Spring, a time when you will blossom and glow and grow as you never have before.

Let me assure you that winters always come to a conclusion. Winters always end. Yours will also. But my friend, let it be a redemptive season in your life. Don't waste the season by complaining and begging to be released from it. Let Papa form you on His potter's wheel, let Him add to and take away, let Him polish and purify. Because Spring will soon be here! And so is the day when He will come for His Bride who will be utterly radiant, beautiful, and ready for her Bridegroom!

So maybe I need to rethink my Winters. Perhaps my childhood embrace of this season is something I need to embrace in the realm of my walk with the Lord! How about you?

Oh, I think I just heard my Beloved call me? Oh, yes, it is Him! He's calling you, too! Can you hear Him?

Song of Songs 2:10-13 "My beloved responded and said to me, ' Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, And come along. For behold, the winter is past, The rain is over {and} gone. The flowers have {already} appeared in the land; The time has arrived for pruning {the vines,} And the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. The fig tree has ripened its figs, And the vines in blossom have given forth {their} fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, And come along!' "



Heb 12:6 For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves

Heb 12:10 he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.