

Seasons
By Patsy Kuipers, Guest Writer

Today's Treasure

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

I once attended a presentation where the speaker began with, “Summer, fall, and winter are seasons – spring is a miracle.” I’ve thought about her comment every spring since. Early warm spells begin to nudge plants from their winter slumber in January here in the South. Witchhazel, Lenten roses, and paperbush start a floral parade that continues for multiple weeks as plants take turns in the spotlight. Trees, flowers, and baby birds – all embody the joyful message of rebirth, which in turn stimulates hope and rejuvenation in us.

But spring gives way to summer, and tender ephemerals disappear for another year as heat-loving specimens flourish. Summer annuals and perennials bloom, then set and disperse their seeds before beginning their decline. Fall arrives. Crops are ripe for harvest, the fruit of spring planting and summer tending. Soon daylight hours decrease, as does the temperature, and autumnal leaves create a riotous display of color – one last hurrah before they let go and blanket the ground for the winter. Ah, winter. Based on my observations, I’ve concluded it is the most misunderstood, under-appreciated season, at least from a gardening standpoint. Those unfamiliar with the ways of plants scan the leafless, apparently lifeless landscape and pronounce, “everything’s dead.” I used to think that too, but my horticulture studies dissuaded me from that notion. For instance, some seeds won’t germinate without scarification, some bulbs won’t bloom without adequate chill time, and many plants depend on the decreased daylight and increased darkness that accompanies winter to flower at the appropriate time.

My newfound knowledge has given me a different perspective. Now when I contemplate winter vistas, I prefer to think the plants are resting while building reserves for the next season of fruitfulness

Contemplating the bedraggled state of my summer annuals one early-September day reminded me of a book I'd been reading. Instead of equating the aging process with seasons as is often done, author Mark Buchanan explores what he's deemed "cycles in our hearts." In *Spiritual Rhythm, Being with Jesus Every Season of Your Soul*, he describes different periods in our lives in terms of the four seasons, each with its own set of challenges and blessings, each necessary if we're to bear fruit.

The friends who gave me the book thought the analogy would resonate with me because of my love of gardening. And so it does. Year after year, I've observed and anticipated the changes as one season follows another, each dependent on the ones that precede.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Sometimes I think it would be nice to live in a constant state of springtime, emotionally and spiritually speaking – productive, energetic, surrounded by resurgent, hope-producing, joy-filled circumstances. But, like the plants, God knows we need all the seasons to produce abundant fruit and to become more like Jesus.

We need to slow down and be still, to rest and draw near to God in all seasons, but we're most likely to do so during the winters of our souls – times of loss and suffering. For it's then we realize our utter reliance upon God, a dependence present every moment, but most evident when we come to the end of our supposed self-sufficiency. My own winters have convinced me of the veracity of Elisabeth Elliot's declaration, "The deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. And out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things that I know about God."

Yet, like the trees and flowers, I've emerged able to bear more fruit, because I know my Father and His ways more intimately. Signs of life return, as our winter gives way to another cycle of spring planting, summer tending, and fall harvesting, a cycle that will continue in us and the natural world until our final winter. Our bodies will rest in the ground, waiting for reunion with our souls when we're called Home, glorified, and welcomed into the joy of eternal spring.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, just as we savor the changing of the seasons in the natural world, please help us to embrace the seasons of our souls, knowing that You have a purpose and plan for each as the cycles of our lives continue until Jesus' return.