

SEASONS

this book belongs to

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A close-up photograph of a sunflower in a field. The sunflower is the central focus, with its bright yellow petals and dark brown center clearly visible. The background is filled with other sunflowers, some in focus and some blurred, creating a sense of depth. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting. The word "Summer" is written in a white, elegant cursive font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the sunflower's petals and the background.

Summer

'You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth; You have made summer and winter' (Psa 74:17).

In the original Hebrew, only two seasons are mentioned in the Bible: summer and winter (Gen 8:22; Psa 74:17; Zech 14:8). Summer is characterised as the end of the rains (Song of Sol 2:11). It was the time of harvest, and wisdom was to keep busy in summer, gathering the harvest, because in agrarian societies laziness would result in lack of food during the long, cold winter when barely any food would grow (Prov 10:5).

Summer is almost synonymous with the sun, figuratively speaking. For people in the Bible, agricultural festivals were determined by the sun's movement, and because of their lack of scientific knowledge, the tendency was to multiply spiritual and metaphorical expressions for the sun. It was the 'greater light' in Genesis; a bridegroom coming from his room, happy like a strong man about to run a race (Psa 19:4-5). It represents endurance (Psa 72:5,17) and even God Himself (Psa 84:11), because it rises and sets every day, showing us that God has promised that 'while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease' (Gen 8:22). In Israel, summer begins on the equinox, June 22.

'Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the Lord binds up the brokenness of His people, and heals the wounds inflicted by His blow' (Isa 30:26). God's beautiful promise to His people involves the shining of the sun to give light and healing to His people when He binds them up from the anger He has towards their faithlessness. That healing includes a symbolic light, seven times brighter than normal.

The ant is mentioned as an example of industry because she 'prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest' (Prov 6:6). She has no one telling her what to do, no chief, officer, or ruler, and yet she busies herself in the summertime, storing her food away for the lean times.

The seasons in general speak of God's faithfulness because they occur with regularity and without fail. **Because of the security we have in the cycles of nature as constants in our lives, we can also trust that God will take care of all the details of our lives.** In our season of summer, the era of our strength and activity, we achieve the most, experience trials which test our resolve and work long and hard to harvest the metaphorical planting we have done in spring. Although this could fit with our middle age for the majority of us, in reality, this could occur at any age, depending on our experience.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN THE TINY YEARS

When I think about God's faithfulness in this season, I think of a lot of things: of answered prayers, past miracles, God's provision for my needs, and growing my heart for Him. However, one theme stands out above all: **Enough**.

Two places in Jesus' ministry stand out and give me so much encouragement in this season.

The first place is in Mark 12:41-44 where we read about the woman with two copper coins. I can relate to her in many ways, but one for sure; it seems like I don't have a lot, and that other people are doing grander and bigger and better things for God. There aren't long prayers and hours of Bible study and leading ministries. There isn't a lot of time, space, and energy it seems. Not a lot of quiet time or sleep. The only thing there is a lot of is tiny kiddos, which we adore, but not a lot of anything else. And sometimes my five minutes of listening to the Bible seem like two tiny copper coins, barely making a sound after other peoples' offerings. But somehow, in some way, God takes my two copper coins and makes much of it. He takes my tired prayers, my five minutes of Bible time, and is so faithful to listen, to see my effort, and bless it.

I'm reminded that He is the God who sees me. He sees what I give, even though to me (or others) it might seem little, or small and that right now, in this season, He knows just how much that really is. That making another meal, cleaning up more toys, and patiently teaching the same things again, and again... and again, is my offering.

He is so faithful to give me the strength to keep going, day after day, He's faithful to show me what really matters; it's not a huge fanfare, the right clothes, or loud declarations - it's people and their hearts. **It's always been about people and their hearts.**

He wants people who simply love and trust Him above all. It's trusting that God sees the little we have and how we come and offer even that, and He just watches and smiles, and faithfully blesses. I'm encouraged to just faithfully give, to show up, to place everything I have into that basket and know that there is Someone who looks past all the noise and chaos and sees me, giving even just my five minutes and smiles.

The next place I think about is the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Have you ever truly thought about that? Two fish and five loaves to feed 5,000 people? Did they feel silly offering so little? And what did they all think was going to happen? Why should you even bother, how was that little going to change anything?

It's interesting to me that Jesus tells them to give them something to eat. How can they? It's obvious that they can't. But that's the point, isn't it? It's not enough, and it never was. Despair seems to set in for them, and sometimes for me too. It's not enough, I'm not doing enough. I can't bring enough. And left up to me, and them, impossible! Did they forget Who was with them, like I sometimes do? Sometimes it takes me a minute or a day until I remember.

I remember that there is a God who is so faithful, and for whom nothing is impossible. A God who listens when I pray and delights in showing just how much He can do. A God who turns everything I offer into enough. I remember too, that there is a man, the Son of God, who became enough so that I didn't have to be. And so I willingly offer up my tiny fish and loaves to what seems like a multitude. And I know it's not enough, but I watch as somehow, leftovers appear. I stand amazed at God's faithfulness and am encouraged to come and bring my loaves and coins again and again. Knowing that it's so far from enough, but that all He really wants is me, and my willingness to offer.

My offerings look a lot like small actions right now. A lot like reading books and folding laundry and wiping counters and noses and bottoms: seemingly endlessly. My offerings look a lot like daily laying down my ideas and wants and... life, to serve my kids, who, despite loudly saying: "I can do it myself" - can't.

This reminds me of someone that I know - the Lord Jesus, who daily laid down the same, and I see how God was oh, so faithful to bless that life. I know the end of THAT story, and I'm so thankful for it.

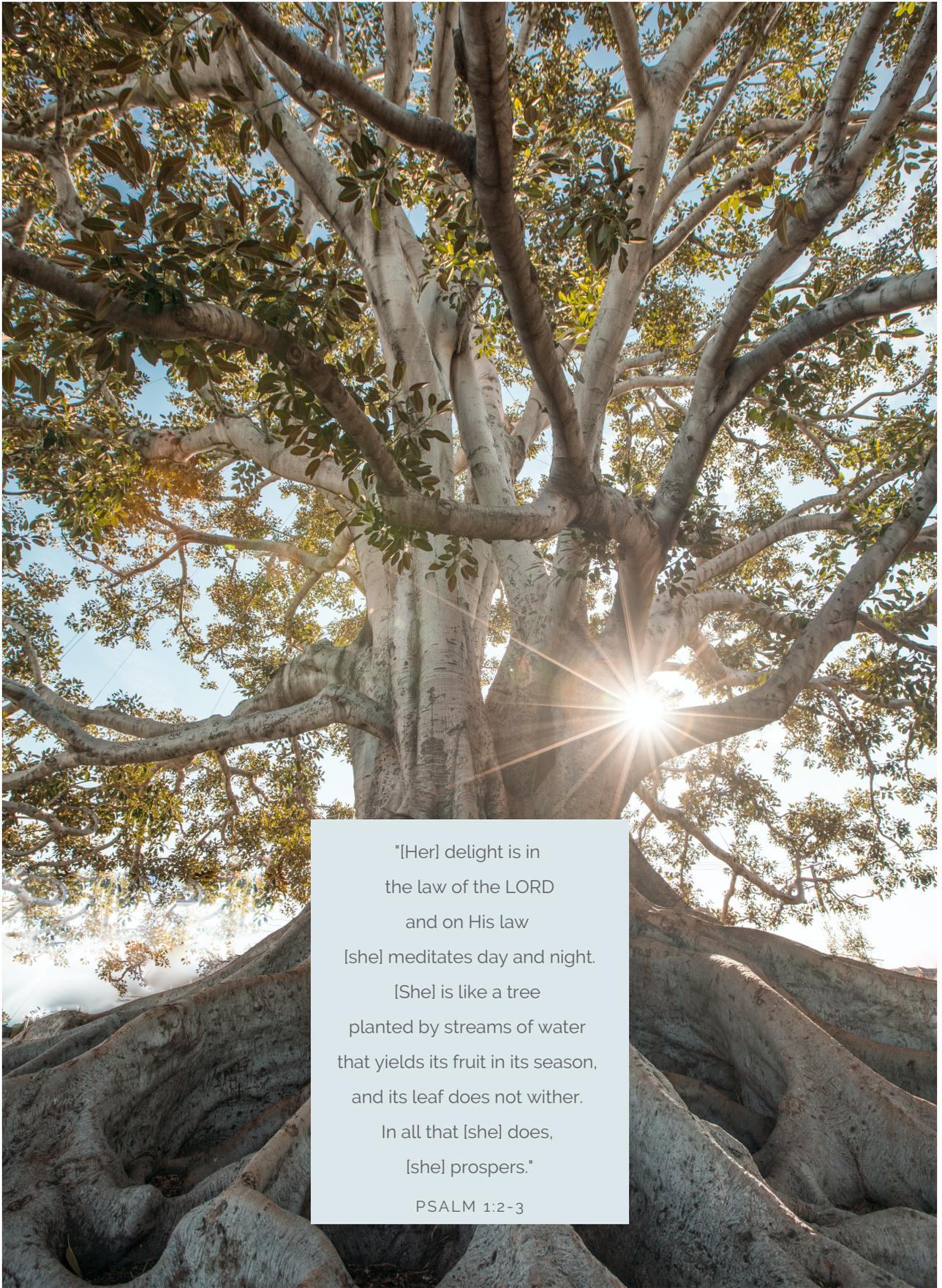
So I stand amazed and encouraged to continue to do the same, knowing that God and Jesus are so faithful to cheer me on and give me, by the Spirit, strength and power and courage to keep doing the seemingly small things.

So day after day I come and bring my two coins, loaves and fish, and a prayer that somehow turns into enough. **And day after day, I see leftovers.**



"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."



"[Her] delight is in
the law of the LORD
and on His law
[she] meditates day and night.
[She] is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that [she] does,
[she] prospers."

PSALM 1:2-3

YOUTH IN THE ECCLESIAL ECOSYSTEM

What does your ecclesia mean to you? Where do teens fit into an ecclesia?

An ecclesia is a living entity, an ecosystem of living organisms or "members one of another" (Romans 12:5) that work together and are interdependent. Teens are a key part of this ecosystem. As Paul says, we are part of the "ecclesia of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15). Teenagers are part of this living system, helping it stay alive, but we also cannot survive spiritually unless we stay in the ecclesia. We need the living ecclesia, and the ecclesia needs our energetic, passionate and willing participation. Each part of the ecclesial ecosystem depends on each other.

It is well known that the greater the biodiversity in an ecosystem, the more stable and surer it will be. In other words, the living ecclesia in Christ might survive without us teens, however, the ecclesial ecosystem will be stronger if we are an active part of it. Sardis was called a "dead ecclesia"... why? Because they had faith and no works. They were not working in their ecclesia to keep it alive. Our faith and love for God are seen in our actions. The way we help, create in and grow our ecclesia stems from our faith.

So, now we know that we **need** to be part of the ecclesial ecosystem for our own spiritual stability and also for others... how can we do this? How can we become an active part of the ecclesia? What can we do to contribute to the life of our meeting? Well firstly, we have to turn up! Turn up when you can and value your spiritual family. We can talk to people of all ages in our ecclesia, valuing each other and remembering we are all an essential part of the ecosystem.

Just a few ideas to involve yourself in your ecclesia: running the technology, organising activities, teaching Sunday school or playing the piano. You could put together a summary of the Bible classes which you then share with the ecclesia, or post to the social media profile of the ecclesia. You could write a card to someone in need, or get a group together and visit someone older and mow their lawn. There are many ideas, and many, though simple, are impactful: like telling the speaker a point that you loved from their talk or singing praise to God loudly and energetically in the hymns and songs! Also, never forget we are examples to those younger than us.

There is so much that can be done to keep our ecclesia alive and vibrant. We are needed by our ecclesias AND we need our spiritual family to sustain our own spiritual lives. Remember, our ecclesia is alive in Jesus Christ and follows a living God. So think about your own ecclesia and how you can stay involved. The ecclesial ecosystem is essential for your eternal life and spiritual stability. It is part of you, an essential part. How comforting is it to think we are all in this together!

"And let us consider together how we may stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

LIVING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

I was diagnosed with MS just after my 30th birthday. Initially, my attitude was that it wasn't going to get in my way or change me, but none of us know what is ahead and a chronic disease doesn't give us any choice sometimes. Twenty years on I can say it has affected every aspect of my life.

MS is a disease that manifests itself very differently in each person that has it. It is called "the mystery disease" because even after years of intense medical research, doctors still don't know what causes it. They can't tell you what you are going to have to face and they can't prescribe medication to take the symptoms away... only to slow the course of the disease. You can 'try and fight it' but finally, my husband and I worked out we had to try and manage the symptoms experienced at each stage.

MS has caused fatigue, loss of eyesight at times (one eye at a time, fortunately), leg weakness and spasticity, lack of balance, incontinence, spasms, pain (muscular pain and burning nerve pain), discomfort and cognitive impairment.

My condition is progressively getting worse and so the challenges keep on coming and we have to adjust to the changes. There has been a lot of loss throughout my journey: loss of balance, loss of mobility, loss of body temperature regulation, loss of independence, loss of spontaneity, and loss of privacy. Privacy has gone now that I need help dressing and toileting.

Relationships change, as everyone reacts differently to my condition and this is ongoing as my condition changes. I've changed because I'm so exhausted all the time and often feel overwhelmed and confused.

Because I am in a wheelchair, people assume that the worst thing about my condition is the loss of the use of my legs. But it is the fatigue, lack of balance, pain, double vision, and incontinence that are the most challenging aspects.

I try to manage: I eat a healthy, well-balanced diet, and I exercise. But often there are feelings of frustration, confusion, isolation, and sadness to deal with as my body slowly deteriorates.

Sometimes these feelings well up at the most unexpected times often due to unforeseen circumstances. I have an electric wheelchair but one week it broke down and I had to go to a wedding in a manual wheelchair. I couldn't move around as easily and mainly sat at our table. Friends were shocked to see me in a wheelchair as if that was unusual. For some reason, I was treated differently all day by the other guests and I went home feeling confused and lonely. My husband and I never realised the difference an electric wheelchair makes, to me and other people. To manage that sort of situation the best thing to do would be to hire an electric wheelchair.

Everything has changed in our life but **God never changes:**

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" James 1:17.

No one can take away my faith but I must always take care to strengthen it. "Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it" (1 Thess 5:24).



What have I learned from my journey so far:

- To focus on the things I am still able to do and not dwell on the things I have lost.
- Relationships change along the way.
- To use my limited energy to do acts of kindness for others.
- To be content. In other words, have few wants.
- To be thankful.
- Just to take one day at a time.
- Not to plan too far ahead.
- That I'm not able to be reliable anymore, as my body doesn't always cooperate.
- Having people do things for me is humbling and that I must gratefully accept their help.
- To keep life simple.
- To always watch for our Lord's return and PRAY!!

THROUGH IT ALL,

God is still good.

LETTER FROM A WISE OLDER SISTER,
MAY 2001

*"Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour,
not slanderers or slaves to much wine.
They are to teach what is good,
and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,
to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind,
and submissive to their own husbands,
that the Word of God may not be reviled."*

TITUS 2:3-5

Dear Sister,

After 4 years of courtship and 50 years of marriage, I have learned and observed many things - particularly the stresses and strains put on courtship and marriage in this last decade or so. We live in a time of instant this or that - life moves at such a pace never conceived of in days gone by.

"Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."

The words in Titus 2:3-5 may seem far removed from our day and age: the feminist movement, the working woman, equal rights and opportunities which can be a blessing or a curse. Yet the Word of God stands. God is the same today, He changes not - so we are to take from His Word what He intends. We are to LIVE by it. Man's (or woman's) opinion does not equal Yahweh's Word.

