

# *Seasons of Hope*

*By Lori Schaffer*

As summer is drawing to an end and fall is on the horizon, the different seasons have been on my mind. "Winter, spring, summer and fall, the Lord your God made them all." I am sure we have all heard this saying. I can find something I truly love about each of these God given seasons. I love the crisp, cold winter air and the way the pine trees glisten after a fresh snowfall. Spring is a time of beauty as a new life emerges. Trees bloom a majesty of pink and white petals, daffodils and tulips cast an array of magnificent colors. Summer brings warmth and sun, along with spectacular thunder and lightning storms that light up the night sky. A kaleidoscope of color envelops fall. Leaves turn to brilliant shades of red, orange and gold as the fresh autumn air ushers in.

Just as we experience the change of the physical seasons, we will experience different seasons in our life and our spiritual walk. I will use the physical seasons to illustrate what your spiritual season may look like. In the winter season you may experience a cold, damp, dark, lonely place. You may be facing a trial or experiencing a loss. You may feel like you just want to climb under the covers and never come out, like a bear who hibernates for the winter. The season of spring may bring you great joy. You may experience a new life. Perhaps the birth of a child or grandchild; a joyous, life-changing event. Your faith may be strong and your confidence in the Lord is growing. The summer season may be a time to cultivate, to remove the weeds from your life that sprout up. The season may seem long, hot, never ending. Summer is a time for harvest, a time to be productive. You may feel overworked or stretched too thin. Finally, the season of fall may bring you great loss and heartache. You may be facing an illness, grief over the loss of a loved one, and an uncertainty of what the future holds. You may feel as if you have nothing left to give. Just as the trees have lost all their leaves, the beautiful color that once was is now no more. You may feel like you have lost everything. But be assured, new life will bloom again, and a new season of hope is just around the corner. No matter what season we are facing, there is always hope for tomorrow.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is a magnificent writing by King Solomon, it states, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven. A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear 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 throw stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost, a time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart and a time to sew together. A time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace."

I love this poem. It really puts life into perspective. All things are appointed by God. Every event under heaven has an appointed time. Every little thing matters. It is

all part of the Masters grand plan. We will NEVER be in a season of pure bliss forever. Unfortunately, we will all suffer losses, heartache, and trials. Sometimes, and dare I say most times, we have no control over the season of life we are in. In a sheer instant, things can change from good to bad, happy to sad. However, what we can control is how we act and respond to adversity, in the season we are in. We have full control over our perspective and how we see and view things. We have a choice to make. Are we going to continue to live a fulfilled life or are we going to live in frustration? Are we going to seek God, seek His will, pray about what is troubling us and give it to Him daily? Or are we going to allow anger, bitterness, and resentment to build up in us? We all have something to be thankful for. If you are in a season of despair, think about what you can be thankful for rather than dwelling on what is going wrong at the moment.

The thing that differs between the physical seasons of winter, spring, summer and fall, and the seasons we experience in our spiritual life is time. Time can be measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. We know without a doubt that the physical seasons will change, and we can predict when. However, our spiritual seasons are not confined by duration. Our idea of time is far different from God's. Sometimes what we experience may last for only a short period of time. Other times it lasts far longer than we like or anticipate.

If I sit and reflect back on my life, I can see clearly the many seasons I have faced in my walk with Christ. I can recall the joy of being newly married. The heartache I faced as my marriage came very close to ending. That was a very trying season in my life, crying out to God to save my marriage, and He did! We just celebrated 30 years of marriage. The joy that came from the birth of my two children, followed by the season of being an exhausted mother and wife. Most recently I have endured loss and great heartache. I have been crying out to God daily, multiple times a day to move me out of this season I'm in. One morning while praying, I felt God speak to me. I remember vividly because it was the first day of spring. As I begged Him to move me into a new season, God said, "I have already moved you out of that season, you are the one who is still stuck." Ouch! Because my prayers hadn't been answered yet, the way I am hoping for, I felt like I couldn't move forward. Like a big, dark cloud is hovering over my head. Isaiah 43:2-3 says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flames burn you. For I am the Lord your God." I find it helpful to pick a verse of scripture, or something positive to meditate on daily. Pastor Steven Furtick, from Elevation Church, has this saying, which he turned into a song. "God is in it with me, He is working through me, fighting for me, God is not against me." I like to use these powerful words to help keep my mind centered on Christ.

We are not alone. If you are struggling right now in the season you are in, I encourage you to choose God. Choose to trust Him, even if you can't see a way out. There is always a purpose for the things we go through and endure. God will use whatever you are going through to strengthen and grow your faith and trust in Him, if you cry out to

Him. There is also a danger we face in these seasons. The enemy wants more than anything for you to become angry and to blame God. The devil will speak negative thoughts to your mind, trying to get you to blame God for your pain or misfortune. Recognize those thoughts for what they are, capture them, and replace them with positive words from God. Meditate on His word and His promises. Try to celebrate and still find joy in the season you are in.

Just as the physical seasons have a purpose, our spiritual seasons we face have a purpose. Give it over to God, every day, every hour, and pray without ceasing. Lay it at His feet. If God has not yet moved you out of the season you are in, perhaps He still has work to do. While I still can't see the way out of a situation I am facing, I know God can. When I thought I finally had the answer to the prayer I have been praying, I was elated. Then, nothing. I felt like the rug was pulled out from under me. Satan got back in my head again. I became angry and upset, how could God do this to me? It was like a carrot dangled in front of me. Then I had this thought. Perhaps, it's not my life that God is trying to work in, but rather, He is using me to further His purpose. God showed me that we can only see the scribble on the page, but He can see the completed picture. It's our job to just remain faithful through every season we face. We are not alone. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely, I will help you, Surely, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

Think about the season of life you are in right now. Has it lasted longer than you would like? Are you angry with God for the situation you are in? Have you talked to Him and prayed about it? Can you think of something that you are thankful for right now and dwell on that? If you are in the season of celebration, celebrate, but make sure not to forget the one who paints the picture. Learn to be content by only seeing the scribble on the page. God is the master artist, and he knows what the completed canvas will look like. All we need to do is to trust in Him, no matter what the situation is that we face. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." I will leave you with this final thought. No matter what season you are in right now, it is always a season for you to put your hope and trust in the Lord.

Be blessed today!