



February 2016

Dear Friends,

Alabama is known for its beautiful landscape. Nestled in the foothills of the lush Appalachian Mountains and stretching to the splendid Gulf Coast, the picturesque scenery of our state is undeniable. However, I must admit, when our over-abundant deciduous trees begin losing their brilliantly colored leaves, it makes for quite a naked and barren season. Here we are in the dead of winter, and many of us are already dreaming of starting a garden, seeing the birds return, and planning for a summer vacation on a white sandy beach.

We, God's children, experience seasons as well. As we look out our windows and view the bleak and unproductive trees, we can relate. Often times we find ourselves in a "winter season" -- a time of life where things seem dead. Maybe you have recently lost someone you love, or a meaningful relationship has been severed. You may have lost your job or simply feel that the Lord is a thousand miles away. There has been numerous times in my life where I experienced these adverse feelings. Some were devastatingly dark times, such as the untimely death of my 17-year-old brother. Others were emotionally draining circumstances, or simply my own doubt and unbelief. During all of my hurt and confusion, I remember crying out to God asking where He was. Looking back, I have come to understand that it is in these times we walk by faith. This is where God's Word proves true. The Bible tells us "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). We stand on the promises that He has given to us even though we seem to be out of touch and engulfed in the adversities of this life. His Word becomes an ever-shining light in the darkness. It is our substance for survival and our unshakable foundation.

The Bible tells us in 1 Samuel 30:6 that "David encouraged himself in the Lord." Okay, so let's do this! First of all KNOW beyond any shadow of a doubt that JESUS will never leave you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:8). He promises you PEACE that surpasses the understanding of the world (Philippians 4:7), and best of all, that when you are at your weakest place in life, it allows Him to be His strongest in and through you (2 Corinthians 12: 7-10). This season is only preparing us for the next. It will pass. Just as our literal winter season is soon to come to a close.

As we take in the view of winter, we have to remember that the trees, which seem so lifeless, has as much life in them now as they did last summer with their mature vibrant green leaves. Though the tree is dormant and unproductive, it is only resting and slowly preparing for a new birth. In just a few more weeks we will see evidence of that life. None of us doubt that spring will come. We all know of, and can envision, its rejuvenation. Why then, should we doubt for a moment that God, in His great and unfailing love for us would not bring us out of this winter season? He keeps the earth spinning, the sun shining and the seasons turning. How much more, does He have His eye on you! Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that He has great plans for us, and those plans are always to bless and prosper us -- never to hurt us in any way!

So, it is winter in Alabama. However, spring is coming! Encourage and strengthen yourself during your bleak and fruitless times, and just know that there is LIFE inside of you! You are not dead. You are not alone. This season will pass. May the Lord replenish you during your winters, help you learn and grow during your springs, give you joy and relaxation during your summers, and may you reap a great harvest in your falls.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ~ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11.0