

**Seasons of Discipleship**  
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We are in a series on discipleship called Forward in Faith. Today I'm speaking on Seasons of Discipleship.

Seasons are periods of time characterized by certain conditions or activities. For example, we have the 4 seasons of spring, summer, fall and winter. Those are seasons based on weather conditions. Also, we have seasons based on activities like football season, baseball season, basketball season, hunting season, the holiday season. Seasons are a part of life. If we do not grasp this we will be constantly frustrated.

When it comes to discipleship, there are several ways to look at seasons. One is to view seasons as life stages. Spring is your childhood years. Summer is your young adult years. Fall is your middle-aged years and winter is your older, senior years.

We can also look at seasons as growth stages in our spiritual life. When we are born again – we are in the springtime of Christian life. We go into summer as we mature and then on to fall and winter. I addressed this concept in a message called The Journey of Discipleship. It was based on I John 2:13-14 which says:

*I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.*

From this we see what to do in each season of our Christians life. If you are a newer Christian, be encouraged that your sins have been forgiven and grow in your relationship with the Father. If you are a maturing Christian, be encouraged that God is strengthening you through His word and teaching you how to overcome the evil one. If you are a mature Christian, be encouraged that you can help develop others into those who are also growing in knowing God. Whatever season of life you find yourself in - whatever generation of believer you are, be encouraged and continue to grow in knowing God and serving God through every season of life.

But there's another way of looking at seasons. The Bible addresses this in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 says:

*For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance.*

*A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.*

God has a time for everything. Looking at that list – some of the things are good and some are not. Yet there is a time for everything.

Who determines the times and seasons? God. In Acts 1:7-8 Jesus said:

*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*

In other words – God determines the seasons and we might not like the season He has us in, BUT He gives us the power to make it through whatever season He sends!

We have the power of the Holy Spirit to make it through:

Good times and bad times

Easy times and tough times

Times of grief and times of joy

Rainy seasons and dry seasons.

Hot seasons and cold seasons.

What we must do is discern the season we are in and act appropriately.

We must learn how to grow in each season.

Now listen - many people want a different season from the one they're in.

If it's cold, they want heat. If it's hot, they want cold.

If it's raining, they want it to stop.

If it's not raining, they want it to start.

As a result – they live in constant frustration about the season they're in.

As Christians we usually go to two extremes. 1 extreme is like spiritual storm chasers. Storm chasers are people who chase storms for the adrenalin rush. Spiritual storm chasers are Christians who cannot embrace the dry seasons of life – they only want excitement. So, they go from church to church chasing a new experience. But they don't grow because they don't plug in and go through the seasons of growth. They don't realize the truth of Psalm 92:13 that

*Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish.*

They never get planted – so they never flourish – so they keep constantly moving to give them an illusion of life change. They are not really changing – they just keep changing the scenery! That does not result in spiritual growth. So find where God wants you and get planted!

The other extreme is what I call Christian snowbirds. Snowbirds is a nickname for Northerners who spend the winter in Texas because of our mild climate. Then when it starts to heat up here – they go back north to a cooler climate. This is what many Christians do – if things heat up in their church or their life – they run to where it’s milder. If there’s a cold season in their church – they run to where it’s warmer.

Unlike spiritual storm chasers who thrive on the extreme – spiritual snowbirds never want any extremes. The point is both of these are trying to escape whatever season God has them in and they both miss out on what God is doing. We must learn to grow and thrive in every season of life!

Springtime season is a time to plant and time to prune.  
It’s the time for breaking new ground and for taking action.  
Spring is the time for new beginnings.  
Spring is the honeymoon of a marriage.  
Spring is the grand opening of a business.  
Spring is planting a new church.  
Spring is the start of a new friendship.

Spring is not the time for harvesting. Instead it’s the time when we determine... “If a harvest is to be, it’s completely up to me.” In other words, I can’t expect anyone else to do my planting for me.

So, in the spring season of new beginnings – we must plant and prune. We must plant seeds for the harvest. We must cut away unfruitful things in our lives. If we don’t plant and prune in the spring season there will be no harvest. Proverbs 20:4 says:

*A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.*

If you have no crop at harvest time – it’s because you planted no seed in the springtime. If you have a small crop – it’s because you did no pruning. You had growth – but it was wild, uncontrolled growth of weeds. It was not fruitful growth.

Summer season is a time of growth and maturing.  
It’s the time for watering and weeding what we have planted.  
Just because we plant seeds doesn’t mean our work is done.  
We need the continual water of the Holy Spirit and we need to pull out the weeds the enemy plants.

Summer is a time for fertilizing what was planted. It’s usually associated with long, hot, stifling heat. It’s about exerting maximum effort without seeing a harvest yet! Many people give up in this season because it’s hard work and there’s a lot of waiting.

Waiting is a part of life; it always has been and it always will be.

However, God promises that we won't have to wait forever. Galatians 6:9 tells us:

*Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*

This is telling us to not to give up if we want to reap a harvest. Just think about that. What if you did give up? What does that get you? Probably nothing. The only sure way to fail is to give up. But your due season will come... If you don't give up.

So just what does due season mean? In the Amplified Bible it means in due time and at the appointed season. In The New Living Translation it means at just the right time. So – trust God in the summer season of heat and hard work. And don't give up!

Fall season – or autumn – is harvest time. This is the season we look forward to all year. It's the time when we enjoy the fruit of our labor. The backbreaking work is done and now we reap what we've sown. It's a time of celebration. There's food on the table and money in the bank. Our harvest depends on what we have already planted. At this point - for the most part - it's too late to start planting. But if we've planted seed and waited on God, we will reap a harvest.

Winter season is a cold season – a time when it doesn't seem like much is happening. Winter can be difficult and discouraging. The trees are bare and lifeless. The ground is cold or frozen. But winter is necessary for rest. We must rest up from the hard work of harvest, so we have energy to plant in the spring. And we can use this time of rest to dream, set goals, and re-evaluate our futures.

We need the rest and reflection of winter to determine what seed we want to plant in the spring... The point is – we need to discern the times and seasons so we will take appropriate action.

In spiritual springtime – plant and prune.  
 In spiritual summer – water and pull weeds.  
 In spiritual fall or autumn – harvest.  
 In spiritual winter – rest and re-evaluate.  
 Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 says:

*The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter.*

God has an appointed time for everything. We cannot change it. We just submit to it. And – we must be ready for it.

I want to prepare you for the tough times when it seems like nothing is happening. I want to prepare you for the winter seasons of life. I want to show you the reasons for the season.

I want to show you the beauty of spiritual winter. As a matter of fact I want to focus the rest of my message on: The 3 Positive Purposes for Spiritual Winter:

**1. Winter kills the bugs of the past and keeps them from affecting the harvest of the future.**

Ask any farmer and they will tell you that a hard winter is a blessing because it kills the bugs before you plant again. This way the bugs won't kill the new growth.

For us, bugs are things in us that are sinful, unhealthy and immature. Things like unforgiveness, anger, addictions, fear, unbelief, impatience. These bugs will endanger the coming harvest.

Everybody has bugs. You know how I know? Because everyone has fruit....and bugs and fruit grow together. But God wants fruitfulness. Jesus said in John 15:5:

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.*

Fruitfulness, however, depends on killing off the bugs. And that happens during winter. However, when we're in a winter season it's hard to see it as a blessing. That's because one of the hardest parts about winter is the waiting. Because remember, winter is waiting. And we need to learn to wait on God's timing if we're going to grow. James 1:4 says:

*Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.*

God has to do His work in us before He can do His work through us. Think about many of the great men and women of the Bible who waited.

- Moses waited on the back side of the desert for 40 years.
- Joseph waited in a pit and a prison before he was exalted to a palace.
- Esther waited through a year of preparation to go before the King.
- Jesus waited 30 years before He began His ministry.

You see many times we think we're ready, but God knows we're not. He knows if He gives us what we want we're headed for a collision.

I remember when we bought our son his first car when he was only 17. He wanted a sports car. We didn't think he was ready but we let him talk us into it. We bought him a shiny white Camaro. He had his car 3 weeks when he totaled it. It was wintertime and the roads were icy. He was inexperienced and he lost control of the car. He wasn't ready to drive on icy winter roads.

You see, just like my son, many of us think we're ready to drive on the icy winter roads of life. But God knows we're too inexperienced. We'd end up losing control. That's why if God says wait then...

It's not time for you to be in full time ministry.

It's not time for you to get married.

It's not time for you to have a baby. \

It's not time for you to go to the mission field.

Psalm 37:34 says:

*Wait for the Lord and keep His way. He will exalt you to inherit the land.*

Don't force things to happen when God says to wait!

## **2. Winter distinguishes between annuals and perennials.**

An Annual is a plant that dies after only one growing season. Just like an annual a "fair weather friend" won't survive a hard winter. The winter shows us who the annuals are. A Perennial is a plant that is present at all seasons of the year. It's enduring and recurring. You may think someone is your best friend. Then tough times come - winter hits - and you find out they aren't your friend after all.

There's nothing like a hard winter to determine a "fair weather friend" from a loyal friend. Proverbs 17:17 says:

*A true friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.*

So, remember to be careful who you trust until you've been through some tough times together.

## **3. Winter forces you to either expand your wardrobe or freeze.**

Deb's sister lives in Florida where the winter season is usually mild. Her entire wardrobe consists of summer clothes. However, if she comes here to visit during the winter season, she has to buy some winter clothes or she will freeze.

The same is true for us.

The winter seasons of life force us to expand our wardrobe or freeze.

So, what type of spiritual wardrobe do we need for winter?

How many of you have heard of Seasonal Affective Disorder... or S.A.D.?

SAD is a condition that occurs during the winter.

Due to a lack of sun, people can become depressed.

Experts suggest getting as much exposure to the sun as possible during this season.

The same is true of us.

If we are in a spiritual winter, we need as much exposure to God's Son (spelled son) as possible.

We also need to put on the appropriate winter wardrobe. In the winter times of waiting, when we may feel discouraged, we must remember Isaiah 61:3 which tells us to:

*Put on a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.*

The garment of praise is the first garment we need during a spiritual winter. But Satan doesn't want us to praise. That's why our second garment is found in Ephesians 6:11:

*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

Satan doesn't want us to praise God in the winter season. He will do anything to prevent praise. That's why we need to clothe ourselves in God's armor. It's the only way to defeat Satan.

Armed with praise and wearing God's armor will prepare us for tough times. If you're in a tough time right now, remember that winter seasons are a necessary part of life.

I want to encourage you with Proverbs 13:12

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick; but when dreams come true at last, there is life and joy.*

God's word promises your winter will not last forever. The new growth of spring will come again. You will feel the warmth of the summer sun once again. There will be another harvest time when your dreams come true.

But spiritual growth can happen in every season of life if we trust God's plan and God's timing. We must trust that God works every season of life together for our good!

2 Timothy 4:2 says: *Be ready in season and out of season.*

God is telling us to be ready for whatever season comes our way. That's because God is always at work in every season of life! Like the song says...He never stops, He never stops working. Be ready for heat and be ready for cold. Be ready to plant and be ready to harvest. Be ready for busy times and be ready for when it seems nothing is happening. Because though it may seem like nothing is happening – something is always happening. He's working everything together for your good to make you like Christ!