

A 4-WEEK DEVOTION

The ~~Weight~~ Wait of Winter



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MEET DENISHA!

DENISHA MATHEWS

Hi friend! I'm a wife and mommy to 3 amazing girls, all exactly 18 months apart. I'm also a new "boy mom" to our recent addition, Micheal Isaiah. While living abroad I had an encounter with the Holy Spirit that changed my life forever! Now my only desire is to love like Jesus & make Him known in whatever way He leads me to. It has been such an honor to serve the Lord in various ways along my journey...

- Young Adult Ministry Leader
- Youth Group Volunteer
- Elementary Sunday School Teacher
- Preaching Team- Prague Christian Fellowship
- Women's Conference Planner
- Conference Intercessory Team
- Women's Bible Study Leadership Team

But let's be honest, titles mean absolutely nothing when it comes to the Kingdom. The moment I surrendered my life to Christ, I was willing to die to self and do it all for the glory of God. I can't wait to take this journey with you!



INTRO

What do you & this snow covered tree branch have in common?

As I was walking the girls home from school one day, the Lord started downloading this analogy. Bear with me...

When I thought of the impact snow has on the environment, I saw the bushes and trees sagging from the weight of something they're not used to carrying. I thought about how the freezing cold snow must be a bit uncomfortable for them.

But just as I thought of these disadvantages, God drew my attention to the dripping.

(swipe) The snow unthawing and revealing what had been covered for weeks.

Then it hit me. We have a lot in common with this tree. Firmly planted, yet we still experience difficult seasons. Like the snow, our hardships in life cover us with an uncomfortable weight. We long for the warmth of spring to rescue us from the ice cold grip of winter.

But you know what I realized?

But you know what I realized? The benefits of the snow outweigh the temporary discomfort, just as the growth from trials outweigh the weight of their presence.

These 3 benefits stuck out to me:

1. Snow insulates the roots of trees
2. Moisturizes the plants
3. Acts as fertilizer thanks to the nitrogen it mixes with as it falls

Whew!!! I got so happy because friends, our trials have the same effect on us if we keep our trust in Jesus!

As we go through the next four weeks, I hope you'll gain insight and encouragement as we dig into the similarities between this example in nature compared to our tough seasons of life.

Week 1: God Insulates (protects) us through the storm

Week 2: His word is like moisturizer, hydrating us with encouragement & instruction

Week 3: His anointing fertilizes our hearts

Week 4: Waiting Beneath the Weight

Objective

To recognize the blessing in hard seasons and how to wait well.

HE INSULATES (PROTECTS) US AS WE GO THROUGH STORMS IN LIFE

Week 1

Our natural reaction to a bad storm might be to allow a bit of fear to creep in. Think of extreme weather situations like Hurricane Harvey, Katrina, etc. I imagine that's how the disciples felt on that boat as the waves crashed over their heads. They were in the middle of the sea with no land in sight being tossed back and forth as their only hope slept peacefully through it all.

"Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" Matthew 8:24-27 (NIV)

Have you ever felt like you were alone in your crisis? Like God was completely silent, leaving you wondering if He was working on your behalf? That's exactly what the enemy wants you to believe. That there's no hope for your situation, so you might as well give up. What Jesus said to his disciples when they woke Him in a panic is still important for us today. "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" I think this question answers itself. Where is your faith when life gets rocky? When you look around and all you see is a raging storm do you gear up for battle, or accept defeat?

I went through a long, stormy season that transformed my life. In the beginning it seemed as if it'd never end, and when it did I thought for sure I'd be on the losing end. I had a mustard seed faith to believe God could turn it around and I held my ground in a spiritual battle that completely changed my walk with Christ. I went to war in prayer daily. I don't think I ever stopped praying throughout the day. It was my lifeline. I devoured the word and clung to the promises of God. I prayed them back to Him, believing His word wouldn't return void.

Just as Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and waves and everything went calm on that boat, He did the same for me. Not only did He answer my prayers, He also changed my heart and kept my mind at perfect peace in the process.

Additional Verses

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.
4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, Psalm 91: 1-5

Meditate on this Word:

"For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock." Psalm 27:5

Self Reflection:

What is your natural reaction to storms that show up in your life? (Fight/flight)
Why do you think that is?

Pray this with me:

Jesus, you are the great I Am. Thank you for being my shelter in the storms of life. When the waves are threatening to overtake me, I will put my trust in you, for I know you'll never leave me. Teach me how to prepare for battle and help me to stand boldly when I come to face to face with the enemy. I believe you will rescue me just as you did for David. Great is your faithfulness!

Amen

HIS WORD IS LIKE MOISTURIZER, HYDRATING US WITH ENCOURAGEMENT & INSTRUCTION

Week 2

In 1 Samuel 30, David and his army returned from war to find that their homeland had been burned by fire and all their wives and children taken captive by their enemies. In their devastation they cried, grieved and mourned.

In their grief they needed someone to blame, so they blamed their leader, David. They thought if they hadn't been off fighting a war with him, none of this would've happened. As if the blame wasn't enough, they began plotting to kill him.

This is where we should take notes from David's response. When he learned that his men were turning against him, he strengthened and encouraged himself in the Lord. He could've handled this many other ways, but he turned to the rock instead. Not revenge, not hatred, not hopelessness. He was honest with the Lord about his despair, which was always followed by his profession of faith in God to rescue him and deal with his enemies.

We should beware of the danger of allowing grief to grow into bitterness, which evolves into anger.

Losing my mom left a deep void that only God could fill. From the moment I knew she was transitioning, I had to decide how I would handle the pain. I could try to carry the heaviness on my own, or lay it all down and allow the Holy Spirit to help me.

Like David, I encouraged myself in the Lord by leaning on His promise that He would be with me through deep water, that He would never leave nor forsake me, that He who lives in me is far greater than he who is in the world. I prayed His word back to Him, reminding myself that the joy of the Lord is my strength, and He will keep me in perfect peace when my mind stays focused on Him.

When my flesh questioned if God was still in fact good even though he didn't heal her the way I prayed for him to, the answer was absolutely, YES. I've come to trust His ways far more than my own. Every time I've been overwhelmed with grief, I am filled with a renewed peace that can't be explained. As God bottles up every one of my tears, I surrender my sadness to Him and allow His joy to become my strength.

Additional Verses

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." 1 Peter 5:10

Meditate on this Word:

"David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. **But David found strength in the Lord his God.**" 1 Samuel 30:6

Self Reflection:

Have you ever been in a challenging season/situation where you responded like David and found strength in the Lord? If so, what encouraged you? If not, look up a few scriptures to have in your toolbelt for next time.

Pray this with me:

Lord, thank you that your word is living and active in my life today. No matter what I'm going through, I can find strength and encouragement by recalling your promises. When my heart is troubled, I know I can rely on You to fill me with peace. You are my refuge, my present help in times of trouble. Help me remember that my battle's already been won, and I give you all the glory for the victory! Amen

Notes

Have you ever been in a challenging season/situation where you responded like David and found strength in the Lord? If so, what encouraged you? If not, look up a few scriptures to have in your toolbelt for next time.

How can I apply this to my life?

HIS ANOINTING FERTILIZES OUR HEARTS

Week 3

“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.” 1 John 2:27

In the Old Testament the anointing was the physical act of smearing on oil. When Jesus began His ministry in the new testament, it was through the divine enablement of the Holy Spirit. As co-laborers with Him, we carry that same anointing in our hearts. It abides in us as an incorruptible seed that can't be destroyed, and teaches us all we need to know.

John was teaching about the anointing to educate Christians with the truth so they wouldn't be deceived by false teachers. In that time it's believed that there was a division in the church caused by Gnostics, who believed in separation from the material and spiritual worlds. Much like today, there are many who proclaim christianity yet believe a gospel that doesn't line up with the word of God. This is why the anointing is so important. It enriches our lives with the truth if we don't ignore it.

I used to pray for more anointing until I realized that all I need is already inside of me. The way we grow in the anointing is by maintaining a lifestyle of intimacy with the Holy Spirit. There's no increase in the “measure” of anointing we're given, but we increase our awareness of it.

Isn't it amazing that we've been given such a gift? Just like any other present, it's ours to keep forever but we must open it to fully enjoy and benefit from it. What happens when you receive a gift and never unwrap it? It sits there dormant, just waiting to share with you all its benefits if you would simply take the time to open it up.

How many times have you known in your heart of hearts the truth, but because it was unpopular or contradictory to the world view you pushed it aside? I pray we allow the anointing to guide our thoughts and actions as we grow through what we go through in the many phases of life.

Additional Verses

“Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven With the saving strength of His right hand. Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.” Psalm 20:6-7

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,” Luke 4:18

Meditate on this Word:

“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.” 1 John 2:27

Self Reflection:

How are you cultivating the anointing within you? Are you obeying the voice of God when He gives you a “knowing” about something? How can you change/improve that?

Pray this with me:

Lord, thank you for the anointing you’ve placed within me. I’m grateful that it can’t be lost or destroyed. Help my awareness of your anointing to increase as I spend time in your presence. Make my life a reflection of your glory.

In your name I pray,

Amen

Notes

How are you cultivating the anointing within you? Are you obeying the voice of God when He gives

you a "knowing" about something? How can you change/improve that?

How can I apply this to my life?

WAITING BENEATH THE WEIGHT

Week 4

Winter can be a long, uncomfortable season with more gray than sunshine and more death than life in the nature surrounding us. A true metaphor for the difficult seasons we go through that seem like they'll never end.

Over the past 3 weeks we've learned how God insulates (protects) us in the winter season, moisturizes (hydrates) us with the word, and fertilizes (grows) us through His anointing. As followers of Christ we aren't promised a life free of trouble. In fact, we can expect the opposite.

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Romans 5:3-5

I know none of us look forward to suffering, but it comes with the territory. The best news is that's not how the story ends! Our savior causes ALL things to work together for our good. Even the messiest, most shameful parts of our story are used to refine us for His glory.

I went through one of the hardest seasons of my life and my prayers started off like; "Lord when will this be over? How much longer do I have to endure?" As I walked through that long, dark winter the Lord began to minister to my heart. After about a year my prayers changed to; "Lord, thank you for strengthening me in this battle, help me not to miss whatever lesson you have for me in this season."

I began to understand that we shouldn't loathe trials, because there's so much growth that takes place in the waiting process. Instead we should wait with expectancy and much prayer, keeping in mind that even when Jesus doesn't change our circumstances He has a way of changing us.

We learn how it's possible to have peace when everything is falling apart around us. We get to know the Lord in new ways that we've only read or heard about from others. He comes ALIVE in our lives through the weight of our trials when we invite Him to help us through them.

If you're still weighed down by a snowy season, be encouraged. The sun will shine again and you'll emerge with greater faith than ever before.

Additional Verses

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Romans 5:3-4

Self Reflection:

*What are some ways God has transformed you beneath the weight of a hard season?
Do you tend to wait impatiently or expectantly?*

Pray this with me:

***Father, Thank you for my winter seasons. I recognize that you can use hard seasons to initiate growth. Just as you delivered Daniel from the Lions' den, I know you'll do the same for me. When my heart begins to doubt, please help my unbelief. You are great & greatly to be praised!
In Jesus name, Amen***

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Hi friend,

I hope you've enjoyed this 4 week journey through the study of waiting beneath the weight of hard seasons. I pray you took time to really meditate on the reflection questions to determine ways you can improve your heart posture in the waiting. When we commit to seeking the Father in everything that concerns us, He pours out His peace to calm us and His strength empowers us to endure every season.

If you enjoyed this devotional, let's stay connected! There's so much more to come.

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Love Joy Blessings,
Denisha

