

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **81. How to Stay Encouraged When Winter Feels Long**

You are listening to episode 81 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast titled, *How to Stay Encouraged When Winter Feels Long*. Welcome to the podcast today. Whether this is your first time here or you've tuned in 81 times, I appreciate you joining me. Thank you. Does winter feel extra long this year? Does it feel as if spring will never arrive? Well, if you're feeling this way, I don't think you're alone. For a number of reasons, winter can feel like it drags on for many of us. This is the subject of this episode, and since the groundhog saw his shadow a few weeks ago, and proclaimed there will be six more weeks of winter, I thought right about now we could use some encouragement to keep our perspectives and hopes lifted over these next few weeks. So, hang with me here for the next short while and we'll find some help and hope together. Sound good? Let's get to it.

**"This is the first year I haven't hated winter in a while."**

I couldn't believe it when these words escaped my mouth a couple weeks ago. But they did, and they were true! It's no secret winter is not my favorite. I don't think it ever has been my favorite, for as long as I can remember. After all, winter in Iowa can be challenging. Especially winter in rural Iowa.

What is my favorite? Summer! With the warm sunshine, the longer days, the increased time we spend outdoors, and my blooming backyard garden. Hands down, yes, summer is my favorite.

A close second is the season of spring. I love the promise that arrives each springtime, of newness, of hope, of beauty coming to life. I love the longer daylight hours and the freshness of the season. And I get excited to see robins and budding trees and plants, and the grass turning green.

What's your favorite season? Do you have one?

So, you can understand my shock with my not-hating-winter statement. But I haven't hated winter this year. (Okay, I really don't like saying the word hate. I just don't. So maybe I'll say *dislike* instead.) I usually dread January. It always feels like the longest month ever to me.

**How about you? Do any winter months typically feel long to you, too?**

This year, however, January didn't feel long at all. In fact, it felt short! Why? Well, I pondered this after I made that statement, because off the top of my head, I wasn't sure why.

But the more I thought about it, I believe it's because it was the most beautiful January I can remember in quite some time. So many of the mornings were filled with frosted-covered trees that were a wonderful surprise to wake up to. So many days were covered in glistening white landscapes, especially when the sun's rays bounced from their beauty. And I so many mornings in January (even on the days it was -7 degrees) I donned my winter coat, hat, and boots, and stepped outside to watch the sunrise (and grab a photo of it or two). Yes, I really did that! That's something I can't say I did that in past Januarys.

And the interesting thing is, I think that made all the difference for me, even though I didn't realize it at the time! Standing out there in the frigid weather, choosing to believe the cold air was more refreshing than repulsive, and watching God raise the sun and paint the sky while doing so impacted my attitude and my perspective. Not only about the day, but about winter. As I think back now, the days I did that were the days that I appreciated the beauty of winter all the more. (I need to write this down in my planner to remember for next January.) And I need to keep doing this as often as I possibly can, because it's clear to me it helped!

### **But I know what it's like when winter feels long.**

Not just the month of January, but all of it. And not just the season on the calendar, but also the winter seasons in life, too. Maybe you know what it's like too.

Because we all have them. The dark, bleak, bare seasons, when life feels heavy and a little hopeless. When the sun goes into hibernation (at least it feels as if it does for days) and clouds overwhelm. When we wonder will life ever feel warmer, and lighter, and full of sunshine again? And maybe you're walking through one right now. Maybe you're finding yourself in a winter season of life and you're ready for spring to arrive asap!

I mentioned in last week's episode how I struggled through a time in my life when it felt as if my past was swallowing me whole. When life was heavy, and my negative thoughts consumed me. That season was sure a winter season in my life. But after I got the help I needed, that season changed into spring. And God used that winter season of dormancy to birth new life in me in the next season.

I soon realized that new birth wouldn't have happened if I never experienced the winter season prior.

### **When winter feels long, we can trust God is still at work.**

He most definitely was in my life, even when it didn't feel like He was.

I began to understand God uses winter seasons of life for healing and rest. Sure, we want to get through those seasons fast, kinda like I want to get through January fast. But God does some incredible work in winter seasons. He brings healing and rest to the land in winter, to plants and trees in winter as they go dormant, to animals when they recharge in hibernation. We're no different. Without seasons of rest and healing, the earth, the plants and trees, the animals, and even us would all be impacted and would suffer greatly.

### **God knows what He's doing in winter seasons.**

So, it makes sense to rely on Him, to completely lean on Him in these seasons. And to expect Him to be at work, even when we don't feel Him or see Him working.

This takes me to one of my favorite Bible verses. It's Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV. Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

And lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

And Psalm 46:1-3 NIRV is another one I cling to in winter seasons of life. God is our place of safety. He gives us strength.

He is always there to help us in times of trouble. The earth may fall apart. The mountains may fall into

the middle of the sea. But we will not be afraid. The waters of the sea may roar and foam. The mountains may shake when the waters rise. But we will not be afraid.

Amen!

God is our help. He is our safety. He is our strength in all seasons of life, including the one we're in now. And He's bringing healing and wholeness we can't yet know. But wait, spring is coming.

The season of rest and healing will give way to the season of new birth and hope. We'll see then the work God has done, as the fruit of rest and healing appears.

**So, let's not be in such a rush to get through winter.**

Let's not hurry it along when winter feels long.

Spring is just four weeks away. You and I both know how fast four weeks can fly by. So, instead of wishing these next four weeks away, how about we pause a little more and notice the beauty before us, even if on the surface it looks brown and barren? How about we pay attention to the little moments God sends our way to remind us He's still with us? And how about we choose to embrace the cold, crisp air, and allow it to refresh us, revive us, and enjoy the moments curled up in a cozy blanket? Because six months from now a cozy blanket will feel way too heavy.

The remainder of this season let's allow God space to bring forth His rest, His healing, His good plans and purposes for our lives. And live each day with a grateful heart.

The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving. Psalm 28:7 NLT

**Amen? Amen!**

We're moving this conversation over to our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. We're discussing and encouraging each other in the winter seasons on the calendar and in life. Come on over to join in the conversation and be uplifted. The link to this private group is in the show notes. I hope to see you over there.

If this episode encouraged you please consider rating it or reviewing it from wherever you're tuning in today. This helps others find this encouragement too. Also be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you never miss a new episode.

No season lasts forever, on our calendars and in life. and before long, the new season will be here. But while we're here, let's choose to make the best of it. Let's choose to see not only the good in each day, but God in each day. Because God is bringing good out of this winter season. He's so good to us, isn't He? Thanks for tuning in today, friend. Stay encouraged and God bless you.

*Julie Lefebvre*