

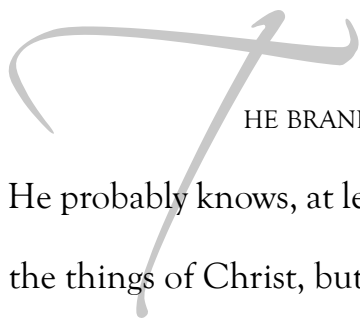
# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



# Seasons





THE BRAND NEW, FRESHLY MINTED CHRISTIAN, of any age, imagines a smooth road ahead. He probably knows, at least at a rudimentary level, that he begins his journey somewhat ignorant of the things of Christ, but that later on he will probably know more. He will listen to and learn from preachers and teachers; he will read God's word and gradually come to understand it; and he will experience what it means to actually live with Jesus on a daily basis. All these will contribute to his sanctification, his maturity; they will feed his faith and he will expect to become, at some point in the future, more an adult in Christ than a babe.

Even with that, however, he may not foresee the ups and downs, the direction changes that typically occur during the life of the average follower of Christ. He surely does not foresee all the off-ramps he will take, diverging off the main artery of righteousness.

There is nothing quite like the feeling one takes away from those early moments with Christ. The Spirit has, for the first or two-hundredth time grabbed the unbeliever by the throat and, finally, the child of flesh has said "yes," and instantly morphed into a spirit-child. Overwhelmed by his need of salvation—a salvation which he now realizes he is incapable of accomplishing for himself—the unregenerate is transformed into a regenerated child of God. And because it is a supernatural experience, there is nothing else like it on earth. It is a sensation similar to, but better than, a teenager's first time behind the wheel of a car, young love's first kiss, a new parent's early moments with a first child. It is a visceral joy indelibly stamped into the memory of those who experience it.

Yet even though the conversion from flesh-being to spirit-being is a supernatural process, and the resulting joy in that moment can be overwhelmingly exquisite, that same brand and level of joy is not a constant in the believer's walk. There will be more mountain peak experiences, but there will also be—often immediately after the former—sojourns through deep valleys of doubt, even anguish. More often, however, Christian joys are interspersed with days of slog-

ging monotony, even languishing doldrums, when the believer wonders if this is truly as good as it gets, or when, after listening too long and too intently to the Siren song of this world, rebellion against his Lord rises in the believer, and he, for a while, departs from the path.

Hope may fade, but it is never extinguished in the Christian. God never abandons His children; if He has called them, they can never trespass or fall beyond His reach. They are His, and He will never let them go.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

*John 10:27-30*

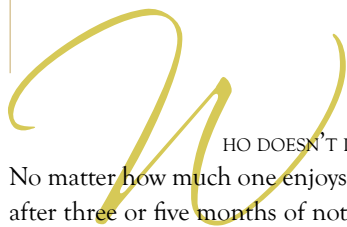
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# A Season Full of Wonder



HO DOESN'T LOVE SPRING.

No matter how much one enjoys the season, after three or five months of not leaving the house without having to add several layers of clothing and coats, of window views alternating between the porcelain beauty of a fresh snowfall and the dull throbbing monotony of brown dead grass and black leafless trees, of country roads alternating between brick-hard ice or snow and mud the consistency of caramel pudding—after all this one is not just ready, but gasping for spring like an oxygen-deprived diver clawing toward the water's surface.

There is a special smell that comes with spring. It is the blended aromas of thawed and warming loam, fresh green blades of grass, and budding bushes and trees. In a word, it is the aroma of reawakening life—although to the casual observer it seems more like new life, for those things now sprouting have seemed for the past several months to be utterly, irretrievably, permanently dead.

And the new life is not limited to the native flora; brand new life is birthing out in the pastures and fields. Young calves cavort with each other, playing tag, before collapsing together in the nursery for naps. Foals struggle to remain upright on ridiculously long and shaky legs, but are soon running and dancing alongside their moms.

So there is a magic to spring. Every season has its own mood, and the mood of spring is joy—boundless, irrepressible, Snoopy-dancing-on-his-doghouse joy. Spring wears a smile—no, spring wears a grin, a sappy, care-free grin.



There is “magic” as well to the first season of every new believer. The inaugurating magic is, of course, not magic at all, but real, substantial, and grounded in eternal truth. But because it is supernatural—above and beyond that which is natural to man—the in-

ception of belief and faith, accompanied by the physical indwelling of that part of God called the Holy Spirit, is so extraordinary that it is easy for remaining flesh to consider it “magic.”

Circumstances vary for new Christians; not everyone walks the aisle of a Baptist church as a young child by responding to the invitation proffered by the pastor at the end of his sermon. Some are older when they come to Christ, for some the transaction is silent and internal, others accept Christ as Lord just moments before they depart this mortal coil. Because personalities vary, some are overwhelmed with emotion in the moment, while others note the change with an almost clinical calm. All, however, feel the change, because it is real. It is substantial. It is truth.

Like the earthly season of spring, the first season of a new Christian is full of wonder, fresh air, and explosive growth. Everything has changed; whether he realizes it or not, the Spirit has altered not just all his senses, but his mind, his heart, his understanding. Words in the Bible that were heretofore gibberish now spring off the page with new, comprehensible life. Conversely, old familiar pastimes, images and words, even friends are now perceived differently through new eyes and a new heart. Before they were companionable, comfortable; now they begin to feel odd, coarse, almost alien.

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

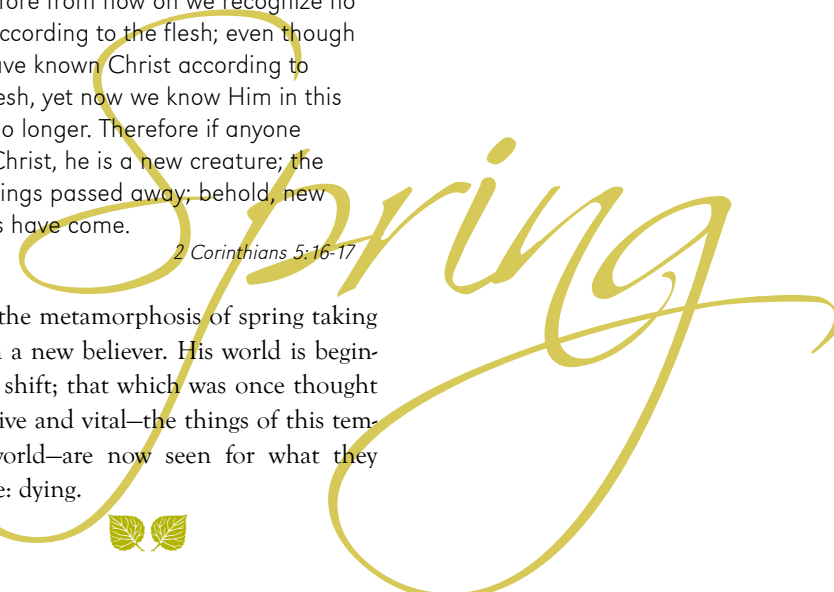
2 Corinthians 5:16-17

This is the metamorphosis of spring taking place in a new believer. His world is beginning to shift; that which was once thought to be alive and vital—the things of this temporal world—are now seen for what they truly are: dying.



“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

Ezekiel 36:25-27



The first season of a Christian is never a benchmark for the remainder of his walk with Christ. No one begins life fully developed; just as no one springs from the



womb conversant in physics, no one begins the Christian life conversant in the things of God. These take time, patience—as well as patient tutors. Before there can be post-graduate school there must be elementary school.

This is where we all begin. It is a season to be relished, lived to the fullest, and remembered. But it is not where we are to remain. There will be more seasons, different seasons, in our life with Christ Jesus. We are not to remain spiritual babies, always mewling for our warmed pabulum, but to become seasoned, knowledgeable, responsible adults.

We are meant to grow up.

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

*Hebrews 5:11-14*

## From Explosive Growth to Doldrums

SUMMER IS LIKE THIRD gear in a car with a stick shift. First gear is to get you moving from a full stop, and second gear is to get you started into traffic. But third gear is the one that gets you really accelerating, getting up to speed with traffic. If the season of spring is first and second gear, summer is third.

The summer months are when nature really takes off, when the woods go from sparse clusters of green sprouting on the

blackened branches to dense, impenetrable foliage that hides from our gaze the deer and coyotes traipsing through. It is when the male birds stop looking and calling for mates, and settle into domestic family life. It is when early blossoming bushes and bulbs such as lilacs, daffodils and lily of the valley, shed their initial colorful blooms and settle into the leafy season.

Summer is when the coats come off, and flesh is reintroduced to perspiration, because summer is when we get the most work done outside. The two go together: extravagant growth and work. The more things grow, the more maintenance is required. Especially in early summer the lawn cannot be held back;

it grows quickly, and must be mowed more often. Spreading trees and bushes must be trimmed, for their good and ours.

But summer, with all its benefits, can also become monotonously routine and, later on, when temperatures peak and humidity becomes oppressive, when all one wants to do is recline under a shade tree with a cold drink, the doldrums can set in. Life turns flat and uninspired, and a season that began with explosive, luxuriant growth and activity can end in lethargy, and the monotony of the routine.



The springtime in a new believer's life—first and second gear, as it were—is followed, ideally, by third gear, and a summer of accelerated growth. Beyond those heady, earliest days with the Holy Spirit lies the root and foundation of Christian faith: coming to a deeper understanding of our Savior Jesus Christ. Here is the work of the church, to embrace the new Christian and begin his or her schooling in Christ through the teaching of God's word.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

*Ephesians 4:11-13*

Thus begins the growth spurt of summer. Guided by a loving, attentive local body, the new believer's faith begins to mature, begins to be grounded in truth, rather than supposition or, worse, fallacy. In this warm season of vitality the babe becomes a healthy, well-fed, growing child on his way to spiritual adulthood.

In the heat of summer, however, it is possible for not just the young believer, but even the fully developed, mature adult—for summer is the longest season in a Christian's life—to become numbed to the routine. When teaching withers into repetitive litany, when discipling becomes mindless mimicry, when the vitality of the Spirit is drained from instruction then even the things of the Lord Jesus are reduced to little more than monotonous routine. And the believer of any spiritual age can then find himself adrift in the doldrums.

They all wait for You  
To give them their food in due season.  
You give to them, they gather it up;  
You open Your hand, they are satisfied  
with good.

You hide Your face, they are dismayed;  
You take away their spirit, they expire  
And return to their dust.



You send forth Your Spirit, they are  
created;  
And You renew the face of the ground.  
*Psalms 104:27-30*



During these lazy middle days of the season the afternoon heat is searing, the horizon lost in summer haze. As the cicadas rev their nostalgic hum, and the unforgiving sun drills down, the pace of both man and nature slows, and ennui becomes a more familiar companion.

In the springtime of our relationship with the Lord, there is easily excited, luxuriant growth. We look forward to time spent with Him. We open His word with eager anticipation, hungry for His counsel. Our prayers are simple, clear, direct, and passionate. There is a powerful, almost overwhelming desire to love Him, to serve Him—to be with Him.

But as the springtime of our devotion moves into summer, and summer begins its slow descent into autumn, the pace of the relationship slows. Our early fervor diminishes. It becomes easier for us to go days without seeking the Lord's counsel, and the obligations of this present age re-exert their claim on our time and affections. We search

# Summer



harder for the words to our prayers, and our ears become less attuned to His voice. Our passion fades.

In nautical parlance it's called the "dol-drum"—a word that has been borrowed to describe that flat, sluggish, unproductive feeling that most humans experience from time to time. In Spiritual terms it can describe a period of listless separation from God—a feeling of "He no longer cares, so why should I," or that God has simply become irrelevant for the moment. Our mind becomes sluggish and dispirited, our thoughts rooted to the soil, rather than soaring with the eagle.

In the summer of our relationship with God, it is easy to think that all growth has stopped—that because the rains have diminished and the heat has caused us to stop looking up, we must settle for the monotonous, stultified plateau on which we find ourselves.

But if we think of that relationship in terms of a lifetime, instead of a solitary year, we come to realize that while there will indeed be the slower seasons they need not be permanent.



We do not spend just one year with the Lord; we spend a lifetime—indeed, an eternity. And while we surely will experience seasons in which we become sluggish and lazy, to accept that condition as the inevitable norm is to deny that springtime will ever occur again, or that reassuring, restoring autumn will not follow.

For they certainly will.

The Spirit of God does not sleep, but is active and inventive throughout the year of seasons and the lifetime of years. When our devotion flags, His does not. When we become hypnotized by the incessant drone of our own ennui, He does not. When we are distracted by smaller things, the Holy Spirit remains focused on the essential. All the time our senses are numbed by the heat-soaked vapors of a tired world, the Spirit living within us remains attentive, sharp, and wholly devoted to the growth of our relationship with the Father and Son.

"Come, let us return to the Lord.

For He has torn us, but He will heal us;

He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

He will revive us after two days;

He will raise us up on the third day,

That we may live before Him.

So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.

His going forth is as certain as the dawn;

And He will come to us like the rain,

Like the spring rain watering the earth."

*Hosea 6:1-3*

## A Cold Rebellion

SO MUCH OF THE WORLD a traditional Midwest winter is something they are all too happy to live without. Cold air occasioned by frozen white stuff, heavy coats and boots and mittens and gloves, shoveling and plowing, icy roads—no thank you, they say.

But of course there can be a profound beauty to winter. A world blanketed by white frosting; sweeping, sculpted drifts of

snow; tree limbs clothed in glittering frost can all be far more fair and dazzling than a manicured lawn in warmer climes.

Winter, where there are four authentic seasons, is the Creator's sabbath for nature. It is a time of rest and dormancy. Deciduous trees, fruit trees, rose bushes and other perennials go to sleep for the coldest months. It is essential for them, it is how they are made; the need for a dormant period is built into them. Many animals hibernate during this period; that too, for them, is essential, part of their natural cycle.

It can be a sabbath for people, as well. There are no lawns to mow, and though

it is an excellent time to prune trees, temperatures near zero, fierce north winds, and snow on the ground inclines one to stay inside where it is cozy and warm.



Almost without exception, at least in this globe's northern hemisphere, winter is the coldest season, and that is an accurate description of the Christian's "winter" in his relationship with God.

If the waning days of summer describe a slowing of our devotion, winter describes it coming to a full stop. Our heart becomes cold to the things of God; we no longer lis-

ten to Him, and we assume He no longer listens to us. When we make that erroneous assumption we are simply projecting



The irony is that there is no other time when we are more in need of God and His consolation, and yet so disinclined to seek Him. Our heart and soul wither into a spiritual ennui, distant and reserved, inwardly bent and bound, understanding our desperate need for consolation, yet unable to seek it. Deep within us there echoes a pitiful, small voice crying out for Him, but we turn a deaf ear even to that.



This lamentable state is bad enough when it comes upon us with unreasoning dismay, seemingly forced upon us by something or someone beyond ourselves. But more often than we care to admit, this wintry condition is self-imposed, the product of anger and rebellion in our own heart.

our own fleshly fallibilities onto a holy but merciful heavenly Father, and an attentive, sympathizing Savior.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

*Hebrews 4:15-16*

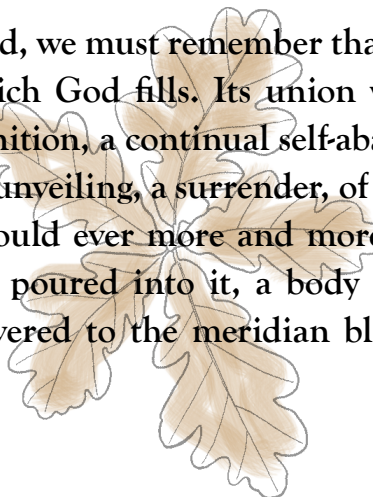
Wintertime in our relationship with God is all of the cold with none of the beauty.

And [Jesus] was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

*Mark 7:20-23*

We do not like to think of rebellion against God in a believer. It makes us uncomfortable, and we protest, "Surely this is not possible in a true Christian." But what is sin if not rebellion? Especially in the venerable be-

And as to God, we must remember that the soul is but a hollow which God fills. Its union with God is, almost by definition, a continual self-abandonment—an opening, an unveiling, a surrender, of itself. A blessed spirit is a mould ever more and more patient of the bright metal poured into it, a body ever more completely uncovered to the meridian blaze of the spiritual sun.



*C. S. Lewis*

liever, the one with many hash marks down his sleeve from decades of walking with Christ, sin is never a surprise, and continuing sin never an accident.

If I do something that I know is contrary to God's will for my life in Christ, I have sinned. If I fail to confess that sin to Him, fail to seek His forgiveness, I have just chilled my heart and spirit against Him. As I continue in that sin, accepting that I am transgressing against my holy Father in heaven, my heart and spirit grow ever colder, and soon they are frozen solid.

And I have just knowingly stepped into winter.

God, through His Holy Spirit and His Son, can melt the slab of ice that was once my beating heart and yearning spirit, but I can resist His healing thaw. Knowing I am in the wrong, I can still clutch greedily to that sin, because I like it, because, at least for a moment, it feels good. And I cry out, "How

can something so pleasurable be wrong!"

That is the freezing rebellion of a wayward child of God.

The good news, if one is a Christian, is that the Lord God and His Christ will not permit winter to continue forever. If we truly are His child, His sheep, He will pull us back into the fold. He will look for us, He will find us, and He will retrieve us.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:37-40

Winter

The Lord is my  
shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
He makes me lie  
down in green  
pastures;  
He leads me be-  
side quiet wa-  
ters.  
He restores my  
soul;  
He guides me in  
the paths of right-  
eousness  
For His name's  
sake.

*Psalms 23:1-3*

## The Fading Struggle

RESTFUL TRANQUILITY settles over the land in the autumn of the year. Creation has ceased striving; Tree leaves are losing their chlorophyll to pass through a rainbow of colors on their way to a dullish brown before their inevitable tumble and sway to terra firma; the grass no longer grows, and is being covered over by a blanket of the earthen-colored detritus from overhanging branches. Little ones of the avian species have left the nest to venture

elsewhere, and most of their parents have vacated their homes to begin the journey south.

Autumn is the breath of bracing fresh air after the oppressive heat and cloying humidity of the later summer months. Save for its rainbow of turning leaves, it may not be as pretty as its predecessor, but is welcome relief nonetheless.

Like its nearest kin, spring, there is a gentle sweetness about autumn. The thunderous storms and parching atmospherics of summer have come to an end, while the frigid lashings of winter have yet to begin. Between the two extremes is a season at rest, a season comfortable with itself.



There comes a moment in the life of most Christians when faith becomes comfortable—and that need not be a bad thing. After the sometimes riotous years of summer, with its periods of wide swings to knowledge and belief; and after the bitterness and rebellion, the cold stagnation of the winter years, come the years of rest—rest, that is, as defined not by the world, but by the Lord Jesus.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and You will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

*Matthew 11:28-30*

Christ’s “rest” for His followers is not the rest of inactivity or lethargy; it is not the spiritual equivalent of retiring to Florida, to shuffleboard and days lounging on the beach, but is a condition of peace, contentment, security—of resting in Him.

Faith, as experienced in the human condition, cannot be dissociated from the human condition. We are what we are: chosen containers of God’s Light, but containers that are fragile, base, and deeply flawed.

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

*2 Corinthians 4:6-10*

Thus many of us who have known Christ from our youth pass through tumultuous middle years of faith in which we do battle daily with the insistent flesh—our “earthen vessel.” We struggle, we fight, we cry “uncle!”

on occasion and give in; then, after conviction by the Spirit and subsequent confession, we are restored to rejoin battle with the despised flesh another day.

The autumn of our faith-life is when much of this struggle has dissipated; we have not surrendered to the flesh, but we also no longer engage in daily battle with it. Oh, the flesh is still there, along with its al-



lies, and on occasion we must strap on our armor, pick up our weapons and meet them on the field of battle. More often than not, however, this conflict is no longer the daily, persistent brawl it once was.

By God’s grace, as many of the youthful and middle-aged struggles of faith subside, we are granted more time, more energy, more desire for sweet, restful communion with the Lord. Concepts of the faith once questioned have found their answer, doubts once entertained have been resolved, conflicts between one’s faith and the fallen world have resolved into a deeper trust in the things and mercies and person of God.

# Autumn

WITH UNREASONING HUMAN LOGIC we lament that the autumn of our relationship with Christ comes so late and can be, for some, so brief. We cry out, “Why couldn’t I have enjoyed this autumn rest from the very start, from the first moments of my faith-life?” *Because, the Lord patiently reminds us, it was the other seasons that brought you to this rest. You needed the stumbling freshness of spring, the explosive growth of summer, even the rebellious chill of winter to become what you are now.*

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren...

*Hebrews 2:10-11 NKJV*

Life in Christ never proceeds in a straight line, and nowhere in Scripture are we promised that it will be a bed of roses. It certainly wasn’t for Jesus, and it will not be for His followers. In fact what we *are* promised is the opposite.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

*1 Peter 4:12-14*



The seasons through which we pass as a follower of Christ are the warp and woof of our life in Him. The fabric, the rich tapestry that

is our life, the myriad colors, light and shadow—everything that comprises who we are in Christ dwells in these seasons. They define us, they shape and mold us, they make us into what we will become—not always in the way the Lord would have it, but then, has that been the case for anyone on earth save for the Son of Man?

As with almost all aspects of the sanctifying life, it is not that we experience the various seasons, but what we take away from the experience: what do we learn, what do we unlearn, and what becomes a permanent, sanctifying part of our life from the growing and changing process.

It is not enough that we change, that will happen regardless, but that we change in *His* direction.

An oak tree begins as a discarded acorn buried in the moldering detritus of the wooded glen. It sprouts, it begins, it is fragile and unknowing, susceptible to the least passing threat. But it grows, and climbs

upward, branches out, becomes sturdier by the day, sturdier against every toughening gale. It begins as a willowy sapling, but soon becomes a tree. It weathers the heat of summer and the freezing of winter; it stands against storms, and over the years and decades wears many suits of clothing. The oak in its old age is confident and strong, having weathered many wounds and indignities, and even in death contributes either to the health of the woods by toppling to earth to rot and enrich the loam, or contributes its substance to warming the winter home of grateful humans.

We, too, are meant to gain strength and confidence—not in ourselves, but in the Lord—as we pass through the seasons of life. With every step, with every turn, our eyes are to be open, our heart listening for the voice of the One guiding our steps. We are to always be looking for Him around every bend in the road, and all along the straight path that will inevitably lead us home.

A highway will be there, a roadway,  
And it will be called the Highway of  
Holiness.  
The unclean will not travel on it,  
But it will be for him who walks  
that way,  
And fools will not wander on it.  
No lion will be there,  
Nor will any vicious beast go up  
on it;  
These will not be found there.



But the redeemed will walk there,  
And the ransomed of the Lord  
will return  
And come with joyful shouting  
to Zion,  
With everlasting joy upon  
their heads.  
They will find gladness and joy,  
And sorrow and sighing will  
flee away.

*Isaiah 35:8-10*