

Life is never played out in a straight line. If one stands at Point A and sets out meticulous plans for reaching Point B, there will invariably be several unexpected stopping points along the way—and sometimes even the original goal may never be reached.

Living



James, the brother of Christ, said it best:
Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

James 4:14

Here in the Midwest it's called the weather. Several weeks ago we had two inches of snow. Since then we have had intermittent shirtsleeve weather. Within a week's time we may have snow on the ground. Then it will warm up sufficiently for Linda and I to haul out the hoses and wash the Jeep (which we do, like clockwork, every couple years). A day later, we may have freezing drizzle that coats every tree and bush and driving surface with

a layer of ice. And through it all, the forecasters will be mostly incorrect about what the following day will bring.

In the story books, and our rose-tinted memories, the approaching season called winter is a frosted wonderland of beautiful, powdery snow. But the truth is that the season contains just about every variety of weather known to man: from shirtsleeve days to bitter, subzero cold; from brilliant sunshine to a seemingly endless procession of slate-gray days; from fresh blankets of white snow to monotonous landscapes of browns and grays.

Our life is not constancy traveled on a paved super-highway, but a series of surprises traveled on a muddy dirt road. The quality of

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Showers of blessing,
Showers of blessing we need:
Mercy-drops 'round us are falling,
But for the showers we plead.

Daniel W. Whittle

our relationship to God is demonstrated every day by how we respond to the twists and turns that come our way. Life may be messy for everyone, but those who have placed their trust in the Lord get the mud washed off quicker.

One day may find us slogging through deep slush, up to our neck in potholes and pitfalls. The next day may find us slipping and sliding across sheets of icy predicaments, never sure whether our next step might send us flat onto our back. And the next day? Well, who knows.

God knows. Woe to the one who slips and slides his way from one day to the next without the Lord. Woe to him who wrangles and cajoles a plastic destiny out of the ether, only to end up hopelessly discouraged when things don't go as planned.

"Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."' But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Luke 12:18-21

There is One who never promises an easy road, but is always there to pick us up when we slip and fall. There is One who offers firm footing when the bottom drops out of our expectations. There is One who knows how to wipe off the mud without wiping away our hope.

HEAVENLY MOISTURE

We are now well on our way to the more barren part of autumn that leads, inevitably, to the locked-up cold of winter. We have just passed through the splendid pageantry of autumn's opening show: the dazzling colors of leaves fading from their summer green. But now those leaves have either moved into the flat brown color of their final days, or have dropped away all together, to collect and molder into the soil. In either case, the trees on our land are now taking on their typical barren look of winter.

There are few things more ugly and apparently lifeless than a stand of oak trees in winter. Devoid of leaves, they perch like hulking black stick figures, gaunt and unapproachable. Without leaves to give them form, their limbs protrude at comical, nonsensical angles, as if put together by committee. They appear almost grotesque, and thoroughly dead.

But let it rain for a day or two, regardless the season, and a mystical transformation takes place on the surface of the trees. Where once was seemingly lifeless, black bark, there suddenly appears a cloak of bright green: Life, seemingly from lifelessness. With a period of rain the almost invisible lichen dormant on the heavy bark springs back to life, giving the tall trees a brilliant new covering.

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

John 8:12

It is easy to forget that within our bodies we carry the life of Christ. It's easy to forget, in this world of darkness and cynicism, that we carry in our persons the brilliance and hope of heaven. On the surface we may look like any other person: mere flesh and bones, happiness tinged with sorrow, frustrations, anger, and darkness.

But deep inside and permeating every cell is the rich, sustaining life from above. We are indeed citizens of another city, but as pilgrims in this unholy land we can, over time, take on the dull patina of its more permanent dwellers.

It is not necessary for us to keep reacquiring the light and life that Christ has given us; the first time was sufficient. But without steady feeding, the light can fade, and we can begin looking like everyone else: ugly and dead. Drench ourselves with some heavenly rain, however, and we spring back into native brilliance—overflowing with life and light from above.

