

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

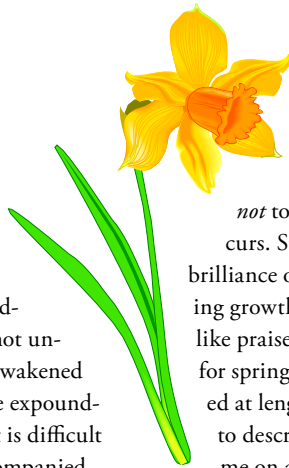
Ephesians 4:20-24

Grace

IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE about spring when it oc- out into the clean, fresh April morning green with explod- heart is filled with an emotion not un- glory of a winter-dead world reawakened be shared, to be explained, to be expound- like the exhilaration of praise, it is difficult

This morning Thornton accompanied walk that took us up the drive from the house, with bluebird houses and budding grape vines, to the freshly turned soil of the garden. So far Linda has planted the potatoes, onions, peas, beets, radishes, and lettuce, and just about every other day they are watered by passing clouds. Thornton rolled at my feet, dampening his thick grey fur with the morning dew. Immediately west of the garden the apple, cherry and pear trees are beginning to bloom and leaf. The cherries will be ready for picking later this spring, while the apples and pears will linger on the branch until autumn.

We continued west and south to the remaining, very old pear tree—perhaps approaching the end of its lifespan, but now already glorious in white blossoms. Filled with his own brand of spring-in-



not to write curs. Stepping brilliance of an ing growth, the like praise. The for spring begs to ed at length but, to describe.

me on a brief past the arbor

duced exhilaration, Thornton raced past me to scale the trunk of the nearby maple tree, then raced past me again to check the weeds in the fence line for mice. At the foundation of the west porch, the bulbs Linda planted last year were already in bloom: a carpet of muscari, cones of bright blue, white-fringed bells decorated the soil still damp from last night's rain. The three prickly, thorn-festooned rose bushes sprouted new growth.

Back behind the house, Thornton on to inspect the rest of his territory in next to the pond, while I, reluctantly, my desk.

Changing Clothes

Spring is a dynamic time of year—a when the world and its people clothes quickly. Later in the year transition from summer to winter considerably slower, as the abundant the warmer months gradually ages and through the lingering autumn to the cold, stillness of winter. But in the spring clothes



continued the woods returned to

time change the will be life of diminishes death-like are changed

quickly. One day may find us wrapped in winter woolens, plowing six inches of snow off the drive, and the next day find us in shirt sleeves raking leaves. Seemingly in an instant parkas are exchanged for sweat-shirts, heavy insulated boots for lighter-weight mudders, insulated gloves for leather work gloves, snow shovels for spades, and storm windows for screens.



The natural world, as well, changes clothes quickly in the spring. Almost overnight the trees sprout new growth on their naked limbs, and bare soil is populated with wide green blades hearkening the soon arrival of tulip, crocus, daffodil and iris. The brown lawn is suddenly green, and ugly thatches of dry sticks magically transform into luxuriant patches of yellows and greens.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:3-7

The exhilaration of spring in the mortal breast—human and feline alike—is very much like that indescribable exhilaration of praise. Like the joyous, early morning anthems of the winged host, it fills us to overflowing with the need to sing out in appreciation to our Maker. The season of spring itself, however, and, more to the point, its physical manifestation in the natural world, is very much like *grace*.

New Clothes

By His grace, God does not require us to put on clean new clothes to come to Him. Our old, filthy and smelly rags do just fine. We may come to him attired in nothing more than our dry winter nakedness, barren of anything bespeaking life and joy. We need not prove ourselves to Him. We need not improve ourselves for Him. We need not purchase new finery with which to clothe our barren ugliness. We come to God as we are.

Once we have come to Him, however, and accept who He is, He begins fitting us for new clothes—sometimes immediately, sometimes gradually over time, but always as surely as spring follows the winter.

Sometimes we are reluctant to discard permanently our old dirty clothes. We think that surely they will still be good for *something* on the morrow. After all, once the climate has warmed, we may need to go out and thrash through some of that hard, physical labor we once performed. Some things never change, right?

But once we put them back on, our old rags soon become as cumbersome and claustrophobic as insulated boots in June; our old habits and ways become as useless as snow fences in July. And even if the fit

is still nostalgically comfortable, we realize that there is something not quite right about our old clothes. They are from a different time.

No, the old clothes have become for us like the discarded snake skin left behind in the sandy barrenness of the desert: a withered dry husk, fading quickly from memory. Our new clothes—gift from an attentive, loving Father—are what now fit us perfectly, comfortably.

New Life

Perhaps this is the visceral connection between the fresh beauty of spring and the exhilaration of praise. Springtime is the natural world throwing off its old, faded covering: that is last year; it is dried and torn; it bears if not the fact, at least the appearance of lifelessness. In the spring the natural world puts on its bright new clothes. They are fresh. They smell good. They are new and clean.

Praise is the innate response to grace. God, in His grace, gives us a *new* life. Then, over time, he outfits us with a brand new wardrobe. It fits perfectly. Its colors are bright and fresh. It makes us *feel* good—about ourselves, about others, about God. And every time we are reminded that our new life is from Him, our heart must burst forth in loud and joy-filled praise.

Over their remaining years our lives will change as surely as the seasons—but with one important exception: The dried and dead winter will never return. dsf

We are not called to fellowship with nonexistence. We are called to things that exist in truth, to positive things, and it is as we become occupied with these that health comes to the soul.

Spiritual life cannot feed on negatives. The man who is constantly reciting the evils of his unconverted days is looking in the wrong direction. He is like a man trying to run a race while looking back over his shoulder!

There is an art of forgetting, and every Christian should become skilled in it. Forgetting the things which are behind is a positive necessity if we are to become more than mere babes in Christ.



And here's the good part: into the empty world vacated by our sins and failures rushes the blessed Spirit of God, bringing with Him everything new. New life, new hope, new enjoyments, new interests, new purposeful toil, and best of all a new and satisfying object toward which to direct our soul's enraptured gaze!

A.W. Tozer