

Simple Faith

◆ December 16 ◆

“Persevering in Tough Times”

Perseverance – Persevering when life feels like winter but never Christmas

John 3:16, Hebrews 11:1, 8-10, Romans 5:3-4, Romans 8, James 1:12

Introduction

Most people have a favorite season of the year. For some, it's the spring when the flowers are in bloom and the weather is warming up. Some like summer with its sunny days, long daylight hours, and time in the water. Others like fall: the start of football, the hints of cooler weather approaching, and the colors bursting as the trees change. Fewer people like winter. In a study¹ examining people's preferences of seasons, most Americans prefer fall (33%), summer is next, and winter is last. In fact, a winter chill is only preferred by 7% of us. There may be many reasons for this. It's too cold. It's too dark and gloomy. It's hard to navigate the roadways.

As a result of winter weather, many people are confined to the inner recesses of their home. This confinement creates a low-grade depression. Doctors have a term for it: it's called Seasonal Affective Disorder. If you're affected by the weather, especially in negative ways, you could have it, and it might leave you S.A.D.

Seasonal symbols often appear as metaphors in literature. For example, agrarian societies depended on seasons (and weather) to plow, grow, and harvest food. So, naturally, because seasons were tied to farming and thus food, they were fraught with all kinds of symbolic meanings of hope and life. But winter functioned as a seasonal symbol for struggle or depression or trial. It evokes meanings of hopelessness and fear. Winter conveys darkness peril.

Yoko Ono wrote the following²:

“Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence.
Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance.
Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence.
Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance.”

We see winter and darkness in the Bible as well. Consider the following verses:

“They will all be left to the mountain birds of prey and to the wild animals; the birds will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter.” (Isaiah 18:6)

“We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.” Isaiah 59:9b (NIV)

Winter evokes the need for strength, for resolve. It imagines holding true even though the path is difficult. It calls forth inner determination to make it through.

Illustration: Have you ever heard the story attributed to Winston Churchill as he addressed his alma mater at the Harrow School? Churchill delivered a speech on October 29, 1941 during WWII. The war was in a quagmire. It was dark time. Hope was waning. There was no end in sight. The words Churchill shared went like this: “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy...”³

This is the kind of determination it takes to live in ALL the seasons of life. Faith is just like it: never giving in, never yielding even when it seems the enemy has all the advantages. In modern day terminology, we call that perseverance.

The author of Hebrews puts faith this way in chapter 11, verse 1 (NIV). *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* I particularly like the New Living Translation for this verse (Hebrews 11:1 NLT) – *“Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.”* *How does faith allow us to persevere in the winters of life?*

One: A Simple Faith Allows Us To Look Forward With Confidence!

In the reality of the world (and the life) we live in, you can live confidently because this place is not our forever home.

Hebrews 11:8-10: ⁸ *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.* ⁹ *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.* ¹⁰ *For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* (NIV)

Put politics and the economy aside for a moment. Put difficult relationships or a job search on the back burner. Our Simple Faith allows us to look and live forward because we understand there is more to the story of our lives – even if it seems we are stuck in the quagmire of school, a job we don't like, or worse, a job we need but don't have. A Simple Faith allows us to look forward because of God's Promise to us.

John 3:16. If you're a church person, you undoubtedly recognize with this verse. If you are like me, it could possibly be the very first verse you remember learning and memorizing. If you didn't grow up in the church, you might still be aware of the verse as the starting point of the Christian faith. You might even remember seeing it at sporting events on signs in the stands. Tim Tebow put this verse on his eye darkener for a period of time. Even though you may be very familiar with it, let's take a brief but slightly more detailed look at it.

John 3:16 (NRSV) - *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*

Notice that there is no “small print” or disqualifying statements in this verse. Simply put, God's love + our simple (no contractual, disqualifying small print) faith = eternal life. This simple verse promises that simple faith in God gives us confidence!

For God loved the world... ALL the World, and that includes both you and me! Have confidence in this as well – our simple faith – the belief in Jesus Christ grants us access. Because of reality of this verse, no winter of life can overcome us, if we continue to live in him.

Two: A Simple Faith Allows Us To Look Forward With Hope!

Perhaps you've heard of Murphy's Law?

Murphy was an optimist! His “law” states, “Anything that can go wrong, probably will.”

Here are some other examples of Murphy's Law...

- Left to themselves, things tend to go from bad to worse
- If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something
- Nothing is as easy as it looks.

There are many more but you get the idea...

I first became familiar with Murphy's Law through my father, who had a similar outlook on life. You probably know those kinds of people. Try as they might, things never seem to work out as expected. Since I come from a similar lineage, I have to be deliberate in where I put my hope.

I choose Jesus! I put my Hope in Him!

(Romans 5:3-4 NIV) - And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope...

It's as simple as that. The song writer of the old hymn saw things the same way and it's best summed up in the chorus...

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand,

All other ground is sinking sand.

- **My Hope is Built on Nothing Less** – Edward Mote (1797-1874)

Jesus is the solid rock of our foundation, our Hope for the best, that only God can offer!

Even if Murphy's Law would seem real for the moment, our God is more than a God of moments, He is the God of ALL TIME and He gives us hope in the power and truth of His promise to us.

Back to Hebrews 11:1 – our *Simple Faith is the reality and confidence that WE hope for!* Make God's HOPE your foundation!

Three: A Simple Faith Allows Us To Look Forward And Persevere!

In my NIV Bible, the word faith is listed 28 times in Hebrews 11, while the NRSV has 29 occurrences. Do you think the author is attempting to tell us something? The message in this text is: Don't Give Up! Never Give In! Have Faith and keep looking ahead.

In the original movie of Narnia, the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005), Lucy, the youngest character, travels accidentally through a wardrobe and goes back in time to WWII England. She lands in a cold, icy wintertime in Narnia. She quickly comes into contact with a "faun" named Mr. Tumnus (played by James McAvoy). During their initial exchange, Lucy, a young girl of about 8 years old, asks Mr. Tumnus, a native of Narnia, "What's so wrong with winter? There are snowball fights, ice skating, and... Christmas! To which Mr. Tumnus replies gloomily, "...not Christmas, not here, only winter for 100 years..."

Whether you are a fan of the winter season or not, 100 years of winter weather seems too extreme for me, especially without any Christmas time?

Sometimes our lives feel like 100 years of winter without respite. No confidence of something better. No hope of something more. But the warm security of confidence and hope in Jesus Christ means we do not need to be impacted by the winter affect.

We can persevere! We can persevere by living a Simple Faith that allows us security in the knowledge that...

- God loves us – without the small print or the qualifiers, because He created us and has more invested in us than even we do. Live confidently with knowledge that the God of creation loves you deeply!
- This is not our eternal home. God calls us sons and daughters and has prepared a place for us. Live with the Hope that leads us forward!
- His Word promises this if we persevere and live a simple faith of confidence in God and Hope for His future, that our days this side of eternity will be opportunities to grow, and impact others for God's Kingdom.

James 1:12 NIV - Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Challenge:

So how can you persevere through the winter season of life and bless others in the process? Consider the following when you struggle with the “winter blah’s”.

- Accept yourself for who God created you to be and don’t compare yourself to others!
- Don’t withdraw from people but try these ideas: Volunteer at a food pantry or a soup kitchen. This is often promoted during the Christmas season, but come January or February – it’s a great opportunity to bless someone else and take your focus off yourself.
- Read books or just help young children with reading by volunteering at an Elementary school, pre-school or daycare. (Probably need a background check to do this in places).
- Visit a nursing home, Adult assisted living center or SR center.
- Collect socks, or mittens and take to a homeless shelter. Stay for coffee, tea or conversation. Make it a habit...
- Get involved with an Angel Tree ministry.
- Get a list of shut-ins from the church and make a “cookie call” (i.e. – any excuse to take cookies or some tasty snack as an invitation to visit. I seen this done with jelly/jam, cakes/pies and even apple dumplings.)

You’ll be amazed at some of the connections you can make with other people wanting to persevere through a personal season of winter too.

Transition to close:

For those reasons, and many others we don’t have time to list, can we celebrate the gift God has given us at Christmas? It’s not wrapped in fancy paper, nor does it come from an expensive store. Its cost is unique and individual but it’s worth more than gold or life itself.

This Christmas, evaluate your Simple Faith in these three ways...

Confidently

Hopefully

and by Persevering

...so that you may live a life full of direction and less of strife – full of passion and more of faith, hope and love. More of Jesus!

Celebrate the birthday of Jesus, confidently, hopefully and never forgetting the Gift from God that makes Christmas worth holding on to!

Merry Christmas!

1. <https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2013/06/10/fall-favorite-season-most-americans-33-heartland-l>
2. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/winter>
3. [You can find a recording of this exact transcript on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L90BCEVH41U>. (approx. 23 seconds) You can also find longer versions or a transcript if you care to using Google].