

Christian Perspectives

As I walk my dog in the early morning, I am astonished at how quickly the landscape is changing. Shrubs that looked like bare sticks yesterday are full of white blossoms today. Birds are plentiful and filling the air with song as I walk along the rail trail just after dawn. Bunnies come out from hiding to watch me pass, and cows are lowing loudly in the distant pastures. I even caught a glimpse of a fawn scrambling through the thicket to hide as I walked by. Spring is so full of new life, and I am a grateful for the evidence all around me.

As I reflect on the beauty of God's creation, I feel an inward longing for the evidence of new life in my spirit as well. It has been a long winter in many ways. I read a passage in Isaiah this morning, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert, and streams in the wasteland?" (Isaiah 43: 18-19). In nature, we recognize that there needs to be a time for plants to lay dormant before they come back to life as the seasons change. It's reasonable to believe this has a place in our spiritual life as well. The seasons of our lives change, and we find ourselves in a season of "winter", whether that is hardship, illness or discouragement. We all go through those times when it feels like all we are doing is slogging through heavy slush and we can't make any headway. We may even feel that God is far away as prayers seem to go unanswered. During these times, it helps us to remember that spring is coming!

One key to making ourselves ready for the new life of spring is to intentionally get rid of the dead life of things that are over and done with. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past" is a command of the Lord that we need to be reminded of. In the same way we clear out our gardens, preparing for new growth, we need to clear our lives of the weight of past hurts, shame and disappointments that we drag around with us. We need to intentionally give these things over to the Lord and leave them with Him. Another key from Isaiah is looking for the new thing that God is bringing into our life. He wants us to recognize what He is doing. "See I am doing a new thing!?" He wants us to watch for it to come to life, just like the blossoms of spring. "Now it springs up; do you not perceive it??" He wants us to expect that He will be making all things new even in the driest, most drastic situations. "I am making a way in the desert, and streams in the wasteland?". We have to trust Him to keep His word and watch for Him to do a work in our life and circumstances.

I know from many years of walking that rail trail, that it's possible to miss the beauty of spring. There have been times when I have walked along, head down, with the weight of the world on my shoulders. There have been times when I haven't noticed the flowering shrubs because I didn't look. God wants us to stop looking down at our troubles, and raise our head to look for evidence of His work. I find it helps to thank Him for what He's doing, even when I don't see it yet. This changes my perspective and I begin to focus on Him instead. I also find it's helpful to praise Him even when I don't feel like it. I will sometimes sing songs of praise out loud as I walk (no one is really around at 6:30 a.m. except the cows and birds). A good friend told me once that you can't be discouraged when you're praising the Lord.

Try something this week. Instead of praying to ask God for things, only praise Him and only thank Him in your prayers. Watch for the evidence of new life around you, both in nature and in your own life. Our loving God is waiting to surprise you.

By Ann McCallum, Executive Director, Highlands Youth for Christ