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Always Winter, Never Christmas

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“I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness.”
John 12:46

In 5th grade, my eyes were opened to a whole new world, when my mom read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to my sister and me. It has been a favorite book of mine ever since. With all the hype about the movie, I've gone back and looked through his writings: all 7 Narnia books, his space trilogy, and *Mere Christianity*. I realize now how much C.S. Lewis' thoughts have really influenced my own. And now he's in the news again, thanks to the major motion picture. The story begins with Lucy going through the wardrobe into Narnia, the land where animals speak and the White Witch rules, turning enemies to stone and making sure it's always cold, bleak winter...but never Christmas. Mr. Tumnus the faun explains it to Lucy. It seems juvenile, but it's a devastating curse by the Witch—subtle, but deadly. The Narnia movie tells the story of Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy coming to Narnia, ancient prophecies, magic, and a coming king—Aslan the Lion, who ultimately comes in, breaks the witch's spell, and makes all things right. As a kid, I liked it. As an adult, I love it. I always wanted to be in the story.

But if you and I were in the story, based on how we live our lives, I think many of us would be right there, stuck, in the centuries-old, dark winter days, full of disappointment, distress, depression, and doubt. I'm always amazed, how no matter how together any of us look, everybody is there...in dark, winter days. Some of us may even live where it's always winter, never Christmas. Like endless January in Michigan.

You may have Winter Days of Disappointment and Distress.

Job 30:26 *“I hope for happiness and light but trouble and darkness came instead.”* You're Have you felt that way? How much of your life isn't turning out the way you pictured it? Your dreams aren't anywhere near where you want them. You're stuck. Frozen. Do I have to say anything more about this? And the worst disappointment isn't the external, is it? Some of you may feel that the disappointment *is you*. My worst winter days are when I listen to that voice that says “You were given so much. You should be so much further along than you are. You shouldn't be struggling with the stuff you are. You're a major disappointment.

Shakespeare called it “the winter of discontent.” It's a harsh, unkind, penetrating winter wind.

Or you may be in Winter Days of Doubt

John 12:35 *“The one who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.”* This winter of your soul has left you drifting, with no clear objective. No clear solution.

Your past is a winter of disappointments, and that voice is telling you you're the biggest of them all. Your present is a winter of stress, and you feel you'll never catch up. And your future is a winter of doubts.

There are plenty of things to have doubts about: the war. The economy. The future. And God! Psalm 22 begins *“My God, why have you forsaken me?”* The same as Jesus' last words on the cross. Of course you have doubts! Sometimes your only choice is between bad and worse. Maybe you have doubts in yourself—

your ability to get a job. Your ability to even *have* a relationship, let alone a close one.

If you hear nothing else tonight, hear this: God cares. He cares about you because you matter to him. Your pain matters to him and he cares about it. Every one of us is in one of three spots in the **movie script**: you're *heading into* dark winter days right now, or you're frozen *in the middle* of the bitterness and cold right now, or you may have just come out of dark winter days...but without Christmas, you're just headed into some new ones. You know how that feels: like life is about nothing more than trading one set of problems for another. That's life.

So where do you turn in your winter days? There's probably not a wardrobe for you to escape to. 1 Samuel 22:29 "*You Lord, are my light; you dispel my darkness.*" How does Christ do that? He says "*I am the light of the world.*" Hear the Good News: He came to bring the true Christmas into our *world*. But how can he bring the light of Christmas into your *life* this winter?

First, He encourages me when I'm disappointed. Psalm 34:18 "*The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope.*" The first way God encourages us is He says "I'm with you." He is even in the midst of your pain. Some of you have had really tough years of winter. Maybe 2005 was disappointing. You didn't get the promotion you hoped for. You didn't complete the project. The relationship didn't go the way you hoped. So where is He? Where He's always been. His name is Emmanuel—God with us! He encourages me in disappointing times by reminding me I never go through anything alone. He is with me.

God uses disappointment to get your attention, like a blast of cold when you open the door to go outside. Tonight, I think Christ is saying to you who feel frozen stiff "Yes, you have had pains and problems. But my purpose for your life is far greater than the problem you're facing and there is a purpose behind it. Let me come into your life and bring you gifts only I can share!"

He strengthens me when I'm distressed. A great verse "*I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength.*" Philippians 4:13. On my own, there's no way I'm competent, capable, or able to handle what comes my way! But with the power that God puts in my life through Jesus Christ, I can do *all things*. Nothing can devastate me in 2006 no matter what happens because I can face it in His strength.

At our church, even written on the walls of the entry ways, we say life may be tough, but "God is good..." When you start trying to say "Life is good and God is tough," you're off base. It's simply not reality, and winter hits hard. God is really saying to you and me, I will not only encourage you when you're disappointed but I will strengthen you when you're distressed.

He will guide me when I'm doubtful. When I'm confused, when I don't know which way to go, John 8:12 "*Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through darkness, for living light will flood your path.'*"

What are you worried about? What are you *dreading* right now? Truth is, you *will* have to make some major decisions in 2006. But no decision you will face could be more important than one you can make right now—to follow Christ and let *him* lead you from Winter to Christmas. Let him guide you through every decision. Seek him. Seriously—you only have one way to make '06 different from '05. And that's to decide right now what lens you look at '06 through: your own, or His. It's through the light of your own eyes, or through the light of His love. Through his Word, he will lead you through a lifetime of winter decisions, into God's best for your life.

Jesus doesn't want to just keep you going. He wants you to change, and He can change you. *You* can't drive out the winter. But when you accept the fact that you seriously need him, you give him room to enter your life. As Ephesians 5:13-14 says, "*It is possible for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also.*" He brings out the best in you. **He can do for you what nothing else can.** Not because God exists to meet your needs, but because He is the Center of the universe. Centering your life on Jesus, the Light of the world, is the only way life was designed to work.

Did you ever think about this? The fact that, in the first Christmas, millions of people saw the bright, unusual star, not only the wise men. The millions did nothing. But the *wise* men *followed* the light. 1 John 2:8 “*The darkness in our lives disappears and the new light of life in Christ shines in.*” It’s one thing to *know* there’s a light in the world. You can still choose to live in the dark days of winter and the dark night of your soul. You can live there. It’s your choice. But, if you want to break through the winter you face, then you must choose to *start living* in the light of Christmas. *Follow Him*. See your relationships through the lens of Jesus’ love. See your situation from a God’s eye view. It’s your choice.

Whatever brought you here tonight, it doesn’t matter. Winter hits us all. We’re not talking religion. We’re talking winter...and a way through it—a relationship with Jesus Christ. God wants to say to you “I’ve sent my Son because I *love* you. I’m *not* mad at you. I’m mad *about* you.” It’s not rules or regulations. It’s a relationship with your Maker. That’s what Christmas is all about.

If you saw the movie, you know that after Aslan the Lion broke the Witch’s winter curse, Father Christmas came delivering gifts. Just so, God comes to our *world* and our *lives* through the power of His Son Jesus Christ.

But here’s the really, really Good News: Not only does Aslan bring Christmas, he sacrifices himself for the children’s lives and their salvation in Narnia. In the book, it’s called the deeper magic, and the Witch knows nothing about it. Aslan dies in Edmund’s place, and the White Witch thinks she’s won. But the moment she drives the knife into his heart, her winter curse dies with him, and death itself begins to work backward. In his sacrifice, Aslan himself comes back fully to life and to victory! He destroys her and goes from statue to statue breathing on them with his breath of life, restoring all the creatures to new life who were turned to stone during the long reign of the witch’s winter. Not only is winter over, but new life is begun. Aslan the Lion is a metaphor for the real and true Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ. When *Jesus* died, he broke the stranglehold that the winter of death has on us. The stone table breaks just like the rock covering the tomb. And now the risen Jesus is moving person to person breathing on them new life in the Holy Spirit. Isn’t it time you joined the cast?

Prayer: Would you pray this prayer in your heart? "God, I’m sitting out here in the cold, in the midst of winter, and I want to know You. Lord Jesus, I don’t understand it all, but as much as I know how, I open up my life to You. Come shine Your light in my life. Fill my dark winter with Your love and Your peace and Your joy and the truth, so not only the new birth of Christmas would be mine, but the second birth of Easter as well. I want to follow You as best as I know how. Help me to understand it more. Amen."