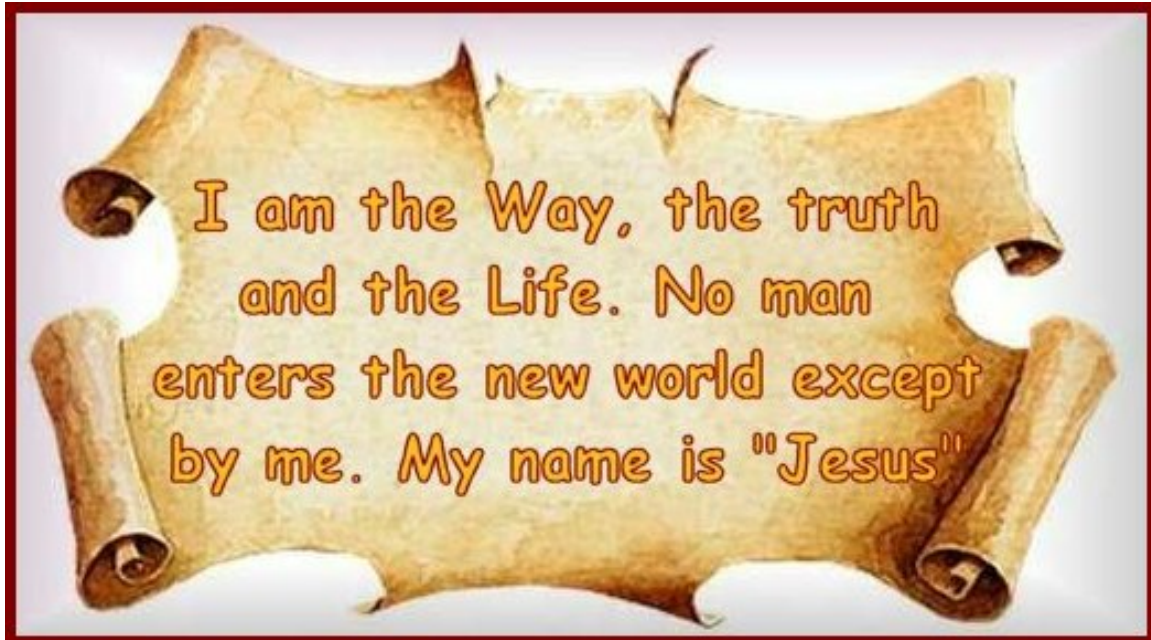


Season of Longer Darkness

by Phil Ware



"Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5 NLT)

For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you." That is why we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid." (Hebrews 13:5-6 NLT)

"And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39 NLT)

Ah, it's now November. Winter starts settling in as autumn's colors fade to duller hues of gray and brown. Hints of winter's coming chill shock our unsuspecting faces. We leave for work or school in the slow fade of the night's darkness. We return home in the early evening's dark embrace. From the beginning of November until late December, each day brings a longer

darkness. Each night descends with more haste and departs with greater reluctance. We live in the season of longer darkness.

Not a few folks of faith find themselves in the spiritual season of longer darkness. A job loss, an unwanted divorce, the death of a loved one, the lingering illness of someone precious, the diminishing reserves of retirement, the bitter loss of the mind's ability, a grievous wounding by a friend, the spiritual failure of a hero ... any of these and many more hurts can leave us in the season of longer darkness. In the season of longer darkness, faith's fire doesn't burn as bright and its moments of shining don't last as long. Life is much more a struggle and faith is very much a battle with our will.

How do we survive the season of longer darkness? Where do we find fresh hope to continue what seems like a longer and harder journey of faith?

In the physical season of longer darkness, there are surprising moments of joy and delight, things like ...

- The refreshing chill in the air after a long hot summer
- The beauty of a cold clear night where the world sparkles under a full moon
- The purifying clean and the soft hushed tones of new fallen snow
- The opportunity for more rest during the longer nights

In much the same way, God brings us blessings in the spiritual season of longer darkness. Because life seems more of a struggle and the spiritual dimensions of our life are more a battle, we often miss these touches of grace, these surprising moments of joy and delight. However, if we look closely we will find them. While sometimes overworked, the little poem "Footprints" still resonates within our hearts because we have found its message true. God does join us in the darkest parts of our season of longer darkness. In truth, in the darkest of those days in this long season, he carries us and sustains in many ways:

**God brings us
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- He sends a friend to help with an encouraging word or a needed rebuke.
- He supplies increased strength to weather our raging nighttime storms.
- He prevents an unseen attack from the evil one when we are most vulnerable.
- He answers hundreds of our prayers even though the one we most want seems to remain unaddressed.
- He speaks to us through his Spirit in the songs we sing with other believers and the words of Scripture when we open ourselves to his word.
- He pours his love into our hearts through his Spirit and strengthens us in ways we cannot know in response to the prayers of others on our behalf.

Yes, sometimes in the season of longer darkness, we face grueling periods of perseverance brought on by life's trials or our own failures and sin. But even in this long season, and even in the darkest of nights that try the human soul, we are not abandoned. No matter what our circumstances suggest, our God is faithful and he has promised that the night will pass; he will not forsake us. No matter how long the night may seem, morning will come with its joy.

So hold on if you are in the longer season. And if you are not, find someone who is, and help point them to the Light until their darkness passes.