



Seasons of Our Lives

2020
EFC-RMYM
FRIENDS
WOMEN

Program Book

Seasons of Our Lives

EFC-RMYM

Friends Women

2020 Program Book

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
We are Made New – <i>January</i>	2-3
Love - <i>February</i>	4-5
In Like a Lion, Out Like a Lamb – <i>March</i>	6-7
Easter Eggs - <i>April</i>	8
Growing in Wisdom - <i>May</i>	9
Wanderings - <i>June</i>	10-11
Fresh Starts - <i>September</i>	12-13
Letting Go - <i>October</i>	14
Thankfulness - <i>November</i>	15
Birth Pains - <i>December</i>	16-17

Additional Note

Please be sure to sign up for the EFM Prayer Letter and learn more about our missionaries and their work as part of your program as well.

Attributions

Written & Compiled by Beth Schafers
Editing help from Sue Randall

*All Scripture references from the
Holman Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.*

Seasons of Our Lives

Introduction

We might not all live in a place that has four distinct weather seasons, but we can all relate to changing seasons in our lives. I'm always astounded in the Church how we can learn from people who are in different seasons of their lives --- people who have walked through the season that we find ourselves in and have come out the other side --- and people who are trudging through the same season that we are.

We have so much to learn from how time ebbs and flows here in this world, yet how steadfast and unchanging our God is, no matter the time of year or season of life we are in.

We often have to learn the same lessons over again, through different seasons, yet God is faithful to continue to teach us these things – no matter how many times we must hear it for it to sink in fully!

My prayer for the following months of devotionals is that you would be reminded of God's Truth and Goodness – His Kindness and Love – His Steadfastness and Unchanging Faithfulness – and that you would use those reminders to spur you on to continue to act in His name as these Truths are proclaimed to the Nations.

We are Made New

Roll Call: Do you have a Resolution for this year? What's a Resolution that you've made in the past that you've stuck to all year?

Devotional: The New Year brings with it a great amount of change. We see the changes in weather and the change in the amount of light in the day, but we also see the world around us making New Year Resolutions and making commitments to change. Some commit to eat better, work out more, gossip less, give more, study Scripture more consistently, or quit bad habits.

We are drawn to the new year and the possibilities that it holds in store.

Universally, we are seduced by the idea that we have a clean slate – a fresh start – that is untainted by our past and doesn't have a grip on our darkest parts yet.

I am reminded each year, in the midst of my own ponderings of what the new year holds for me, that every day is like this for me as a follower of Christ and that I can walk in the Truth of that, no matter what time of year it is.

We are made new in Christ and His mercies are new every day.

Sometimes, it's hard to recognize this because, unlike so many of our New Year Resolutions, it has nothing to do with our outward appearance. We are changed from the inside and sometimes that is harder for the outside world to recognize.

I often think about when my uncle was undergoing intense cancer treatment and needed cells from a match to help him fight this battle. My father (the oldest sibling) was a match and gladly donated his to help his brother (the youngest sibling). We were extremely thankful for such a great match and that my uncle was able to move successfully through this treatment.

While my family is great at handling even extremely tough situations with humor, one of the funnier things that happened during this process was when the doctors told my parents and my aunt and uncle that the brothers would now have matching DNA. They explained that my uncle could commit a crime and not be worried about leaving DNA evidence, because it would point the authorities to my father anyway!

We all laughed a lot about this and it has become part of some running jokes, but I also can't help but think that it's an amazing picture of what happens with us as Christ followers.

When we surrender our hearts and lives to Christ and the Father's purpose – when we invite the Spirit to abide with us and lead us – we volunteer to have our DNA makeup match His. He changes us from the inside. We may not look different on the outside, but our entire internal identity changes and everything we touch now bears that new make-up.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, Genesis 1:31a, Lamentations 3:22-24, Isaiah 43:18-19, Colossians 3:9-11

Discuss: How has God been faithful in your life to show you that you are a new creation in Him? How have you made that evident to others as you have lived out the Gospel? How can you use confident trust in this Truth to share the Gospel and support others as they share Truth and Hope around the globe?

Final Thoughts: When we trust God's ability to make us new in Him, we can more freely share that Truth and Love with others. Pray that God would open your eyes to how He's done this work in your life and in others so that you might gain more freedom in sharing your story and freedom with the world around you this year.

Love

Roll Call: What is your love language? (Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Gifts, Quality Time, or Physical Touch)

Devotional: Love is such a subjective term. It can have positive and negative connotations. It can be used in the deepest of senses (i.e. an undying love for your spouse or child) or in the lightest of terms (i.e. I love chocolate ice cream).

Love permeates our conversations and our days, even if we don't realize it. Scripture tells us that our hearts will be where our treasure is – so the things that we “love” will be where we invest our time, energy, money, and actions. Even if we are in denial about these things that have our love, it will be reflected in our lives.

We can obviously see the ultimate examples of this in the life and sacrifice of Christ. But an additional example is one that I come back to often: the kind of love found in Ruth's story.

Hesed is a Hebrew word that is used several times in the book of Ruth (and a couple hundred times throughout the rest of the Bible). It is roughly translated as “loving kindness” and is a type of love that includes action and sacrifice – a kind of active love that endures and works for the good of the recipient, not for the frilly feelings of the one exhibiting love.

Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and God all exhibit Hesed love in this short book. It is a book full of examples of people who could have pursued other endeavors – let their minds and hearts lay focused on other people and things that could have gained them more – more wealth, more immediate happiness, even more love in return.

Instead, we see examples of others choosing an enduring loving kindness for the good of others. We see action and strong devotion. We see a love that is richer and deeper than any that the English language is able to properly define. We see a love that is made to endure to eternity and stand fast without shaking. What a perfect example of the love of our Father!

Read: Ruth 1:8, 2:20, & 3:10, Exodus 34:6, Isaiah 54:10, Micah 6:8, Matthew 6:21

Discuss: How have you witnessed God's committed, faithful loving kindness in your life? How have you used that experience to show God's kind of love to others?

Final Thoughts: In Americanized culture, we see ourselves as consumers too often. We only give to get. We are too slow to sacrifice for the Good of others without tangible results. God calls us to more and showed us the ultimate example of this. Pray that you would be willing to step out of your comfort zone – out of the frilly kind of love we too often lean on – and into the enduring, sacrificial, Hesed love that we are called to.

In Like a Lion, Out Like a Lamb

Roll Call: What is your favorite thing about Winter? What is your favorite thing about Spring?

Devotional: When we enter the month of March, we are still clutched in the winter months. While this affects some climates more than others, there is always a significant shift in both temperature and temperament when the Spring Equinox comes and we switch to the Spring season.

Before Christ, our lives are like the beginning of March. We are dead in our sin. There is no warmth. There is cold and brokenness. Our hearts are icy and closed up.

But then the Son comes...

With Christ, we awaken into Spring. The warmth covers us, thaws our hearts, and opens us to the possibility of Hope and Life.

Sometimes, it's easy to cling to the cold of the winter. We hold onto our dead selves instead of laying down the lifeless parts and moving forward in Life. We keep the icy parts of our heart buried down underneath and pretend that it's not there.

But if our hearts and lives are to be fully transformed and renewed, we must allow the ice to thaw completely. We must bring the cold parts of our hearts into the sun and let it warm us and change us all the way through.

As the seasons change where you live – no matter how little that shift might be – let the hope of Spring be a reminder of the Hope of Christ and what He brought to the world. Let it be a reminder to bring to the surface any part of your old self that you're still clinging to. The world will know the difference.

Read: Song of Song 2:11-12, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 3:9-10

Discuss: What are some areas where you're holding onto your "old self"? How can you bring those areas into the Light and let them be transformed? How can you help others in the same process?

Final Thoughts: God calls us to step out in faith and obedience. By letting our hearts, minds, and beings be transformed under the new identity we find, we allow Him to show off His great Love. Shedding the old layers of our sinful selves is a glorifying step in this process. Do so with confidence and humility --- confidence in who He is and humility in knowing that this process is about much more than you.

Easter Eggs

Roll Call: What is your favorite holiday tradition?

Devotional: One of my favorite parts of Easter is the egg hunt. I love the looks on the faces of the kids in our family as they hunt the backyard at my parents' house to find their treasures. I love that we can have conversations with the little ones about why we hunt for eggs and what it symbolizes --- the rolling away of the stone and the finding of an empty tomb.

I love to bask in the reflection of New Life being found by the one who seeks it out. These kids are determined, focused, hunting for the treasure they know is hiding from them. What a fabulous picture of the One who seeks us out while we are still sinning and hiding from Him!

Another, sillier version of Easter Eggs that our family loves are the ones you can find hiding in movies and video games. They are the ones you don't even usually know you're looking for – you just have to constantly be on the lookout for these little surprises – which include cameos from famous people, secret messages, and other fun things. While these don't often carry any Spiritual significance at all, I can't help but think of them that way when their name reminds us of the Easter Eggs we know and love.

This leads me to wonder – am I always on the lookout for the surprises that await me around any turn? Little (and big) things happen all the time that are much more than coincidence. Am I giving credit where it is due for these “cameos” that God plays in my every day life and interactions?

Are we paying attention when we go through the checkout line and chat with the cashier? Are we listening to what our spouse, kids, and coworkers are saying and going through? Are we watching for the ways that God shows up and the times that He allows us to play a part in that?

Read: Psalm 105:4, Psalm 139:7-10, Proverbs 8:17, Isaiah 43:2, Jeremiah 23:24, Jeremiah 29:13, Luke 24:2-3, Acts 17:27

Discuss: How has God shown up and surprised you in your life? How can you help open the eyes of others to see how He is working around us all of the time?

Final Thoughts: May we be aware enough each day to recognize when God makes Himself known. Look for the big things in the little moments – both the ones that you can be on the receiving end of and the times that you can help show Him to someone else.

Growing in Wisdom

Roll Call: What is your favorite memory from your years in school?

Devotional: We are in the season of graduations. You may or may not have someone close to you graduating this year. Whether it's preschool, high school, college, or graduate school, this is a milestone in a life. It is a marking point saying "Look – I know things! I have knowledge!" It is a great time to reflect on how much we've learned.

If you follow the "traditional" educational path, you'll be done with graduations by your mid-20s. You'll have a lot of schooling in your past and a lot of life in your future.

Once we are past graduations in our lives, let us not forget to stop and have these marking points. We may not be receiving a formal education in a classroom anymore, but the wisdom that we are gaining at this stage in our lives is beyond valuable.

You won't get a certificate with your name on it showing your accomplishment when you learn to forgive or when you learn to love well or when you learn how to communicate better with your spouse or even when you learn to take on more responsibility within the Church in a healthy, balanced way.

But you'll have grown in your Kingdom foundation and that is worth pause, reflection, and celebration.

Read: Job 12:12, Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 4:6-7, Proverbs 14:1, Colossians 2:2-3, and James 3:17

Discuss: How have you grown in wisdom since your days in formal education? What lessons have you learned in recent years that God has allowed you to put to good use? How can you pass along this wisdom to other generations?

Final Thoughts: Let us be intentional to stop and reflect on what we have learned in our lives – how God has helped us grow in wisdom and how we put that to good use in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Wanderings

Roll Call: What is the best trip you've ever taken? If you could take a trip to anywhere, where would you go?

Devotional: Summer time is often filled with adventures. It's the time of year that the kids are out of school, so we often see families taking road trips and vacations. The National Parks are busting at the seams with people who have been itching to get out into nature and get some fresh air.

We are born adventurers...wanderers...explorers. We are naturally curious and somewhere along the way, too many of us find ourselves falling into the monotony of everyday life.

It's easy to fall into the safety net of our bubble – our family, our home, our neighborhood, our city, our church, our circle of friends, etc. But we were made for more.

There is a BIG world out there. There are a LOT of people out there. God had big things in mind when He created this place and the creations that walk here. We were made to live in community with the people and places around us.

We should try new things, meet new people, and go to new places. We should wander and explore until the Gospel reaches the farthest corners of the world. For some of us, that means literally going around the globe. For some, it means walking to the house next door and starting to build a confident, glorifying relationship with your neighbor.

Whether it's a mission trip, a relocation, a road trip, or a trip to the grocery store – we should look for God wherever we roam. This is amazingly simple in places like the Grand Canyon and the vast expanse of the ocean. It's easy to stand in awe at creation when we wander to these places that are open and endless (and usually not touched much by human hands). We see evidence of His awesomeness in the beautiful destinations we venture to.

But can you see His glory on your street? In your backyard? In the variety of faces that come to your church? On the faces of those you meet in the checkout line?

Read: Job 12:7-10, Psalm 85:5, Psalm 96:11-12, Psalm 104:24-25, Psalm 119:133, Matthew 4:19, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 5:25, Colossians 3:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:5

Discuss: Where is the place that you have been most in awe of God's creation? Where is an area of your life where you have least recognized His glory? How can you better see Him in that area? How can the way that you see His creation affect how you live your daily life?

Final Thoughts: Let every day be a new opportunity to have an adventure. Look for ways to see His goodness and beauty in every moment. Commit to going wherever He leads you and to look for Him wherever you roam.

Fresh Starts

Roll Call: What's your favorite office/school supply?

Devotional: One of my favorite movies of all time is *You've Got Mail*. I've seen it so many times I couldn't begin to count. And at the end of Summer, like clockwork, the school year starts and I feel the need to watch it again.

"Don't you love New York in the fall? It makes me wanna buy school supplies. I would send you a bouquet of newly sharpened pencils, if I knew your name and address."

Every time they say this line in the movie, I can practically smell the fresh pencils, straight out of the sharpener. There's a reason that every little kid loves their new supplies and their new backpack – it's a fresh start, a clean slate, a new beginning.

As adults, we get to witness this in our own kids and the children of our friends and family. On the first day of school, we are flooded on social media with "first day" pictures. Our kids are (for the most part) excited and ready to take on the world.

Have you ever seen the "after the first day of school pictures"? These hilarious comparisons show the morning picture – perfect, smiling, put together children with clean new clothes and perfectly done hair – versus a picture of them getting off the bus at the end of the first day – disheveled, exhausted, messy hair, clothes awry. While it's a hilarious way to honestly show our lives on the first day of school, I also believe it's a good reflection of life in general.

Every day we have a new start – a clean slate – a new beginning. We have a chance to take on this day and show it who's boss.

And often, by the end of the day, we are disheveled, exhausted, and everything has gone awry.

We go into the day ready for battle, and battle we do – coming out the other side with our battle scars.

Thankfully, we still get a fresh start the next day. His mercies are still new every morning. And every day that the sun comes up in the East, we can count on His goodness to get us through the day and never fail. We can walk into each day with confidence – not in our own abilities – but in Him. We can walk into each day telling fear that it has no hold on us – not because we have no weaknesses (we do) – but because He has already won the day for us.

Read: Lamentations 3:22-24, Isaiah 43:18-19, Galatians 6:14-16, Philippians 3:13-14

Discuss: In what area of your life do you need to claim a fresh start? What new beginning have you been walking through? What successes and what failures do you need to give over to Him before you start tomorrow?

Final Thoughts: Commit to wake up tomorrow and face the day with faith like a child. Walk into tomorrow knowing that, in Him, all things are possible. Go into the day knowing that you have a clean slate and a chance at a new beginning.

Letting Go

Roll Call: What is your favorite season?

Devotional: Fall brings with it the changing of our surroundings. We gradually see Fall stake its claim on our world as the leaves change to reds, yellows, and oranges before falling off.

We take road trips to see this change in the foliage. We awe at our tree-lined streets as they burst in color. We regret when they lose their hold and fall to the ground (and not just because it means more yard work).

I have met very few people who don't love the peaceful look of the changing landscape. It speaks to our souls in a unique way. These deciduous trees that shed their leaves each Autumn have something to teach us...

Deciduous means that the leaves "tend to fall off" or are not permanent/transitory. This process is part of their life cycle. In a more general sense, this process has been described as the dropping of a part that is no longer needed.

What a beautiful picture of the beauty of Redemption! We are called to die with Christ – letting the old fall off of us. Put it to rest. Get rid of it! You don't need it anymore!

Then...once we've let the old fall away...we make room for new Life...for new Beauty. We allow Him space to make us even stronger and more beautiful going forward. We make room for His lifeblood to spread to our roots and give ourselves a chance to sink deeper into His goodness.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Isaiah 43:18-19, Jeremiah 29:11, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Peter 5:7

Discuss: What are some of the leaves that you're still clinging to? What do you need to let go of? What's something that you've let "fall off" before that gave you a new sense of Hope, Life, and Freedom? How can you use that experience to help others who are still clinging to the parts that are no longer needed?

Final Thoughts: No matter what season of life you are in, we always have things that we need to let go of. Pray that your heart will lean towards letting go of the things that keep us from fully submitting our hearts to Him. Pray that it would be evident in our lives as we move forward in New Life and that others would be drawn to that.

Thankfulness

Roll Call: What is your favorite Thanksgiving tradition or food/dessert?

Devotional: The holiday season can bring an immense amount of both joy and sadness, depending on the season of life we are in. When we are surrounded by the people we love, our hearts can feel like they are spilling over with goodness and wonder . . . but if we are grieving the loss of a loved one or going through a difficult situation, it can all feel like too much to handle.

It is easy to be thankful when everything seems to go according to plan or when we are “happy”. It is much more difficult when we are in the throws of despair or when our hearts ache for something or someone that has been lost.

One of the most marked up books in my Bible is the book of James. The second verse alone is one that I return to over and over: *Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, (HCSB).*

Notice that word “whenever” – it is not “if”. We are assured that in this life, we will have difficult seasons – it is a given. Jesus promised us that in this world, we would have trouble. We know that these things will come, and we know that He has the victory, but can often still feel pulled under in the turbulent waters of this life.

But look at the beginning of that verse again: “Consider it a great joy”. **Consider it.** That means that we must THINK about it carefully --- that we must make the decision to see it through a joyful/thankful heart. This might not be an outlook that comes to us naturally when our hearts/bodies/minds/families are hurting, but we are called to be intentional about how we, as Christ followers, meet these moments and situations.

Read: James 1:2, 1 Chronicles 16:34, Psalm 9:1, Psalm 69:30, Psalm 95:2-3, John 16:33, Colossians 3:15, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Discuss: What are you thankful for in this season? How can you “consider” your current situations and change your outlook to bend your heart closer to God in thanksgiving? How can you be a witness to other generations to handle hardships with a joyful heart?

Final Thoughts: Listen to “Desert Song” by Hillsong Worship. Declare and rejoice that God is our victory and is ever present. We always have a reason to be thankful and sing our praise! You have access to a Hope that is unlike anything else - make it a point this season to find joy and thankfulness in every circumstance and to set an example for others that sets you apart from the world.

Birth Pains

Roll Call: What is your favorite Christmas decoration?

Devotional: Most of us have multiple nativity sets at our homes that we put on display during this season. I have three in my home – one that was given to me by a family member and holds sentimental value, a Willow Tree set that I bought myself, and a beautifully carved set that I brought home from one of my trips to Uganda. Each one brings up different emotions and reminds me of what a miracle this season is.

My daughter likes to “play” with the Willow Tree set – she sets everything up in just the right way and makes the pieces talk to each other. She makes animal noises and coos over the baby Jesus. It is a part of her inner dialogue to make it all pretty and enjoyable.

I think it is in all of us to try to make this season beautiful, put together, and enjoyable. We put up our trees and seasonal décor. We watch our Hallmark movies. We wrap our gifts and plan our meals and organize our get togethers and hope for the most perfect Christmas for our families.

But I always come back to these nativity sets and what they depict --- a poor family forced to relocate while expecting a child and who were refused a warm, safe place to stay. A child born in a cave or stable. A child who came to save the world, but was threatened from the moment He entered it. A group of shepherds that got to see and hear from angels and were prompted to find and adore the Savior. A group of magi who were led by a star to find Him. These same magi who made Herod aware of this miraculous arrival and then also avoided him on their way home. There is a huge narrative represented by these sets we display in our homes and churches.

When I look at these sets, I often think of the Andrew Peterson/Jill Phillips song “Labor of Love” that spells out how “it was not a silent night”. When we think of the nativity scene, we are often filled with serene images of this peaceful group, with cattle lowing and strangers coming to adore Him. But what did it take to get to that moment?

If you've ever given birth or if you've been witness to the miracle of life entering the world, you know it is not peaceful. It is painful, noisy, sometimes scary, and let's be honest – gross and bloody.

But if you've been in a delivery room, you know that a scary, painful delivery process is usually followed by tears of joy, loss for words, full hearts, and a peace that settles like nothing else. We wait with bated breath to be sure our babies are healthy and safe, then lay back and sigh with relief and bliss.

The peaceful moment of the Nativity is the afterglow of a painful process that spans centuries. More than just 9 months, God had been working on this arrival throughout His Story. The first half of your Bible is the labor that brought Him here! The pain and turmoil of the Old Testament is what we hear when we imagine Mary's cries and screams. The joy and victory that our Savior brought His people is what we feel when we imagine her joyful cries and relief once she held her baby in her arms.

Joy and Victory and Life do not come easily. They come with a cost and, often, they come slowly. The birth pains are terrifying, exhausting, and hard, but are completely worth it in the end, as we move from our own power to His.

Read: Isaiah 53:4-7, Micah 5:2, Luke 2:1-20, Romans 8: 1-6

Discuss: What seasons of life have you labored through and finally seen the result of? What are you laboring through now and how can you cling to Hope and Joy as you wait for the peaceful afterglow of this season of life? How is God calling you to labor on behalf of others?

Final Thoughts: Be sure to remember during this season that our Savior did not arrive easily. This God who humbled himself to come to save his people had to fight his way into, through, and out of this world. He conquered all and has claimed victory for us already. Let this season be a reminder of all that He sacrificed and all of the peace and joy that He brings.