



ANGER and HOPE WINTER and SPRING

Spring is a traditional time of renewal throughout the world. After the long, dark and cold days of winter, when the first green shoots poke their heads out of the moist earth, and the days grow longer and warmer, there is a natural tendency to rejoice. The earth goes through the death of winter only to return, time and again, to life in spring.

For many people, the gloom of winter leads invariably to anger. Anger at the weather, the lack of suitable outside activity, and for some, anger at others. This anger is similar in some ways to the anger we feel when we experience a significant loss. It is anger at the situation we find ourselves in, at our inability to control what is happening around us. Rationally we understand the cause of our anger and the effect it has on ourselves and others; emotionally we are caught in anger's trap.

Spring, on the other hand, has an almost miraculous effect on our mood. We see a pretty flower blooming, and we smile. We watch children playing and remember our own childhood springs. When a rain shower passes overhead, we duck inside temporarily or put up the umbrella and patiently wait it out, knowing that it will end. We have no more control over the weather than we had in the winter, yet anticipating the sunny days helps to moderate our response.

We have no more control over the spring rains than the winter storms. Spring weather can be just as dangerous as winter weather, yet we tend to accept it better. Why? Because we have the ability to look beyond the weather to the time tomorrow or next week or next month, when we know the skies will be clear and the breezes gentle.

Anger dissipates easily when we know an insult has been temporary or unintentional and will most likely not be repeated. The anger of grief, which tears at the core of our being, sits on us like the gloom of winter. Our loss is so immediate, so present, that it is hard to look beyond, to see how others are working through their grief and to overcome our own feelings to help them.

Spring is not all sunny weather, no more than recovering from a loss brings a total and permanent sense of satisfaction. The holly tree didn't survive the ice storm. The loss of a job brings financial hardship and questions about one's ability to work. A child's disability means that there are some things that will just never be easy or even possible. The loss of a loved one leaves a crater in life's landscape.

We begin to heal when, like the first day we go outside without a coat and mittens, we realize that things are changing. Life goes on. The stump of the old holly is surrounded by hyacinths planted years ago. Losing a job has created time and energy for volunteering. Dealing with disability has made us appreciate the simplest gains. The death of a loved one shows us strengths we never knew we had.

Spring is the season of Hope: When we stop looking back at the past, and begin to look forward to the future. When we see the small benefits of great loss. When we discover in ourselves the reason for going on – because tomorrow might be warmer, sunnier, brighter. Because tomorrow can be better than today. When we are hopeful, we no longer need to be angry. Just as spring does not erase the effects of winter's storms, but softens them with new growth, hope does not conceal our losses, it allows us to shape our future in new and positive ways.

By Kathleen Dare Stidham