

Through the  
*Seasons*  
with *God*  
A devotional  
journal for women

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WELCOME

# January

*And now we welcome  
the new year.  
Full of things  
that have never been.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke

# January

## A Blank New Page

A new year unfolds upon our lives—a new chapter to be written. A new beginning filled with fragile graces. Optimism rises. Our hopes are renewed. And even when it's not clear, I never doubt that God's promises for our future are unfolding as they should.

Outside my window, the view of the January garden is sweeping and grand. A pure and crystalline newness hangs from trees and bare branches like baubles on a Christmas tree. The atmosphere wears the wings of doves, ashen and soundless. And it seems, too, that the new year moves forward, shrouded in a heavenly cloth decorated in jewels of hope, faith, and sacred gladness.

As the January snows creep in, invited by the slanting winds of winter, the unaccustomed eye may be tempted to see only a garden that has been brutally stripped of its glories. But for the eye that sees far beyond the obvious, there rests genuine loveliness and a chestful of evidences of God's bountiful provisions for humanity at Creation.

The winter garden rejoices in the beauty of frost and the purity of silence. It rests, but it doesn't die. It remains silent, but it still speaks in a thousand voices.

In the bleakness of January, in the barrenness of the land, and in the silence shed by the nude fingers of winter, we can still find joy, beauty, and evidences of God's amazing love toward His children.

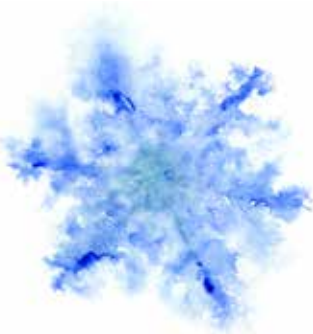
### Talking to the Father

*Father, I am like the winter garden, encrusted in the ice and standoffishness of self-unworthiness and sin. Instead, You saw in me that shining jewel hidden in the ice. You saw value in me. You removed me from the sins that buried me and hindered my light and brought me into life, saved in Your salvation.*

*Like the new year unfolding before us, so we, Your earthly children, have been given a clean new slate of opportunities. We start anew. May our deeds and lives be witnesses of Your love to those around us from now on.*

Great is his faithfulness;  
his mercies begin  
afresh each morning.

—Lamentations 3:23, NLT



## "New Year Resolve"

*The time has come  
To stop allowing the clutter  
To clutter my mind  
Like dirty snow,  
Shove it off and find  
Clear time, clear water.*

*Time for a change,  
Let silence in like a cat  
Who has sat at my door  
Neither wild nor strange  
Hoping for food from my store  
And shivering on the mat.*

*Let silence in.  
She will rarely speak or mew,  
She will sleep on my bed  
And all I have ever been  
Either false or true  
Will live again in my head.*

*For it is now or not  
As old age silts the stream,  
To shove away the clutter,  
To untie every knot,  
To take the time to dream,  
To come back to still water.  
—May Sarton*



In what ways does  
the new year renew  
your hope?



### Reflect

∞ As you begin this new year, list some ways you can actively observe  
God's new mercies each morning.

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# January

## Remember Me

The snow-moistened January garden seems to be whispering, “Remember me?” and, “Who are you?”

Indeed, winter has kept me away from the garden, trapped in its icy grip for far too long. Winter stretches wide and unkind over the land, but the garden is a magnet. I cannot be away from it any longer. It calls me to it; it entices me to render its ground a sacred place of prayer and worship. And as I walk upon its frozen floor this morning, while feeling my head and hands go numb by the tug of icy winds, I am nevertheless pulled to it with renewed enthusiasm.

I want to obey these feelings in my heart and begin working the soil. I want to sow a thousand seeds and start dividing the hostas, but the gusts of icy wind that scatter restless leaves around my feet reaffirm in me the notion that this is only January. I must wait.

My eyes study the silent garden: its rugged nakedness, the ashen shades of January painting its quiet anatomy with the sorrows of the graveyard, and I am inexorably reminded of my own fate.

Each fallen leaf and bare tree limb, the vanished perennials of yesterdays, and every needle, snag, and organic debris accumulating on the garden’s floor are all brutal tokens of finitude and hopelessness. They shout,

“You [shall] return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19, ESV).

God is our secure place of refuge.

The sense of impermanence is overwhelming. But then, as if a reminder that our home and ultimate destination is heaven, from my peripheral vision suddenly erupts the sight of gentle, velvety light, emanating from the hurri-

You are my refuge  
and my shield;  
I have put my hope  
in your word.

—Psalm 119:114, NIV

cane lamp sitting by my kitchen window.

Light coming in threads of unpretentious coppery gold. Light melting the gloominess of my thoughts and reminding me that home is where my refuge and comfort reside. A burnished glow flowing like honey all over my soul, and my spirit is quickly revived with optimism and renewed faith.

My warm, illuminated home is a reminder of God's promises. He is home. He is home to the weary of this world. He is the Light from which humanity derives life. He is our secure place of refuge from the inclemency of our human existence. Our fortress in time of trouble and the Master of our fate.

My mind has been quieted; my heart assured.

### Talking to the Father

*Father, how very precious and life-giving Your promises are. I have grown weary with years and fearful by what lies before me, but I will not be guided by feelings but by Your constant love and unwavering promises of hope and eternal life.*

### God's Words

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"  
(1 Corinthians 15:22, KJV).

### Reflect

☞ Spend some time reflecting on how God as led you in the past. How does this change the way you see today and the future?

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The world  
leaves us weary.  
Our hearts  
find a home in Him.



# January

## The Winter Garden

We woke up this morning to an amalgamation of fog and solid frost. Frost on rooftops and street lights. Frost on dried leaves scattered on solidified grass and on roses crystallized like candies.

I can hardly see the junipers just down the garden past the fence, muffled as they are under this silent cloud of muted whites and grays. There are no caroling birds to serenade the morning. No petals embellishing the pea-gravel paths. Yet the garden is overflowing with countless quiet blessings:

- ∞ The purity of ice-covered mornings and crispness on frozen wings of the atmosphere.
- ∞ The holy silence born only in the depths of winter.
- ∞ The gentleness in which nature repairs the landscape and all its surfaces.
- ∞ The times winter breezes carry nature's jewels from the frozen land into the house—a dried leaf, like little waves of incense satisfying my soul with assurance, love, and peace—all gifts from God.

The austerities of the winter garden remind me that adversity and trials, when left under the divine care of God, become blessings in disguise. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3–5, ESV).

Spring follows the darkest days of winter.

It is easy to lose hope in the wintry garden. It is easy to forget that spring follows the darkest days of winter. Uncertainty and doubt can fill our hearts with fear when there seems to be no way out. But for the true Christian, that’s usually when God’s presence shines the brightest.

The LORD gives strength  
to his people;  
the LORD blesses  
his people with peace.

—Psalm 29:11, NIV



## Talking to the Father

*Father, "make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.*

*"O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life."\**

## Reflect

☞ List some of your favorite winter blessings that remind you of God's presence.

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☞ Recall a time when God used winter to restore your hope.

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God's presence  
shines brightest  
in the darkness.

## God's Words

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7, ESV).

\* This anonymous text is usually called the "Prayer of Saint Francis" or "Peace Prayer."

