

Kizuna—February 2021
“Winter Flowers”
Pastor Sarah Wilson

Until I moved to Japan, I’d spent my whole life in places with long, cold, dark winters. As a result, I came to hate winter. I could never keep warm, the sun never shone, and everywhere outside it was depressing and dead. No leaves on the trees, no green grass, no flowers, no life.

So I was completely unprepared for the amazing surprise of a Tokyo winter. First of all, November was beautiful! I always used to think that November was the worst month of the year. But in Tokyo, the temperature is perfect, the changing leaves are beautiful, and the harvest continues.

And then it just continued! A sunny winter is really a miracle if you’re used to a dismal cloudy one. Yes, it got cold, but I had survived much colder weather than here.

But the most amazing thing of all was the winter flowers.

Until I came to Japan, I would have considered the expression “winter flowers” a contradiction in terms. By definition, winter was the time of year when there were no flowers at all. Winter is the time of death, not life. Flowers only arrived in springtime—usually April at the earliest.

And yet, in Tokyo, flowers bloom all through the winter! In fact, some flowers bloom *only* in the winter. They are not spring or summer or autumn flowers. They come to life only in the darkest, coldest time of the year.

I can’t help but see in this a beautiful symbol of the word of God in our lives and hearts. Until we know God, our souls are dark and dead, empty and lifeless. Until we know God, our souls look completely unpromising—you would never expect any life or growth to come out of them. Why would anything even try to live in such a dark and lifeless place?





But the word of God does not look, in the first place, for summer souls—for places where life and growth is already happening. The word of God seeks out wintry souls and lives that are more like death. The word of God is not limited by the coldness of our hearts or our lifelessness. In fact, the word of God's work is precisely to seek out the dead, the lost, and the wintry, in order to bring life there. The word of God is a winter flower, blooming at the unlikeliest of times!

This is such good news for us. So often we think that we have to perform for God. We think we have to take our deadness and turn it into life. Only then, we think, God will come to us. But that's not right at all. Exactly the opposite!

God comes to our empty winter hearts and says: "It's time for some flowers to grow here." God himself plants the seeds, waters them, gives them growth, and makes them bloom. The word of God is a winter flower—and turns us into winter flowers, too, so we can be the bright signs of life in a suffering world.