

Adventuring with God

with Jeanne Hedrick

April, 2008

Divine Shelters

A friend of mine at work felt led to send me a note recently about mourning cloak butterflies. She felt it would help me to weather the season of mourning that I am in with regard to my mother's failing condition, and I certainly did find her note very encouraging and comforting. But as I thought more about the interesting features of this butterfly, I began to see how all of us could benefit from looking at it a little closer.

The mourning cloak butterfly, found throughout Europe and North America, is rather large in size compared to other species. Its striking color pattern of a dark purple- or brown-black underbelly contrasted by bright yellow borders with iridescent blue spots on its wings makes it easy to identify. What is most interesting about the mourning cloak, however, is the fact that it lives through the winter months of our cold climates.

How do such delicate creatures survive? By allowing themselves to be suspended in a hibernaculum, a protective case or covering that encompasses them throughout the winter months. The coverings are usually found hidden beneath loose tree bark or in unheated buildings. Such wintering dens protect them from the cold winter winds and keep them out of the view of predators like birds and squirrels. It is a place of immobility and waiting, not exactly "fun" by butterfly standards. But once the warmer climes return, the adult mourning cloaks are free to fly again and enjoy all the delights of spring.

When adverse conditions arise in our lives and we face particularly harsh testings in our walk of faith, God graciously directs us into our own kind of emotional wintering den. There we hide away with Him, comforted and protected by His Spirit, until we are ready to face a busy season of life again. We may find such dens confining and boring, since we cannot do there what we normally do. We may feel rather useless to the people around us and wonder why God has

rendered us ineffective in our outreach and other spiritual ministries. In the confinement of our protective sack we often experience loneliness, frustration, and emotional turmoil.

So we have a tendency to chafe at our restricting circumstances when what we really need to do is to trust our Father. He is pulling us away for our good, even though it may not feel like it at the time. If we can learn to relax and wait in an attitude of hope and expectation, we will spend our time of "overwintering" so much more profitably! Shut away with Him alone, we can learn valuable lessons about His faithful provision, His comforting presence, and His Kingdom principles. When we are busy with life and other people, we seldom take the time to get rejuvenated spiritually or be renewed by Him. Our focus is outward, not inward.

But in the wintering den we truly abide in Him – we have no choice! We are kept by His power, and we learn things that will be taken with us once the storms are over and we return to our normal Christian life. In Matthew 10:27 Jesus tells His disciples, *"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."* Once our times of intimacy with God, shut away in our wintering dens, are over, we will have something new and life-giving to share with others. Knowing that can make the long months of waiting more bearable. In time, we may actually look forward to the times that drive us into His arms, for out of them come renewed spiritual strength.

Like the mourning cloak butterfly in spring, you may be enjoying a busy and joyful life at the moment, soaring on the Spirit's currents as life sings all around you. Your unique gifts may be a source of great blessing to others in your field of service. Your bright yellow borders may flash in brilliant contrast to the deep purple of your underbelly as you move from place to place, your grace and beauty speaking of your

Creator's exquisite sense of design. If so, rejoice and be glad! Be grateful that "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 1:1) and it's your time to fly!

But don't assume that spring will last forever. Be prepared for the winter months that will eventually come. Know that at some point the north wind will awake and blow on your garden "that its fragrance may spread abroad" (Song of Songs 4:16). It will not be fun, and it will cramp your style. But in that place you will know the faithfulness of your Father God in a new way. "In the midst of the awfulness, a touch comes, and you know – it is the right hand not of restraint nor of correction nor of chastisement, but the right hand of the Everlasting Father. Whenever His hand is laid upon you, it is ineffable peace and comfort, the sense that 'underneath are the everlasting arms,' full of sustaining and comfort and strength." (Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest*).

If you are in a wintering den like me at the moment, spend your time of waiting in quiet expectation, confident that God sees you and is at work on your behalf. If being shut up with

Him means that we come to know Him more intimately and learn to depend upon Him in every circumstance of life, that is of inestimable value. Thank Him for this incredible opportunity, even if you have to endure some difficulties and are uncomfortable for a time. His love, peace, and comfort are not extended in fuller measure in the harsh realities of winter, but it often *feels* like they are. Maybe it is just that we are more aware of them when we have fewer distractions to take our attention.

One last point I want to make about the mourning cloak butterflies: They need to be warm to fly. To increase their body temperature, they open their wings and angle their bodies toward the sun to soak up its warmth. My spiritual power depends upon the Son, too. As I learn to bask in His presence, I am able to soar to greater heights in the Spirit. Learning to lean, to depend, on Him in the challenges of winter will make our spring-time living even more fruitful. As we draw our spiritual life from His abundant resources we can survive, even thrive, in any climate or circumstance. Aren't we blessed people?

"What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms."

Words by Elisha Albright Hoffman (1887)