



Winter Turns to Spring





FOUR SEASONS

Winter *turns*
to Spring

CATHERINE PALMER & GARY CHAPMAN



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Winter Turns to Spring

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FOR TIM, WITH LOVE

C.P.

New love is the brightest,
and long love is the greatest;
but revived love is
the tenderest thing known upon earth.

THOMAS HARDY



NOTE TO READERS

There's nothing like a good story! I'm excited to be working with Catherine Palmer on a fiction series based on the concepts in my book *The Four Seasons of Marriage*. You hold in your hands the fourth and final book in this series.

My experience, both in my own marriage and in counseling couples for more than thirty years, suggests that marriages are always moving from one season to another. Sometimes we find ourselves in winter—discouraged, detached, and dissatisfied; other times we experience springtime, with its openness, hope, and anticipation. On still other occasions we bask in the warmth of summer—comfortable, relaxed, enjoying life. And then comes fall with its uncertainty, negligence, and apprehension. The cycle repeats itself many times throughout the life of a marriage, just as the seasons repeat themselves in nature. These concepts are described in *The Four Seasons of Marriage*, along with seven proven strategies to help couples move away from the unsettledness of fall or the alienation and coldness of winter toward the hopefulness of spring or the warmth and closeness of summer.

Combining what I've learned in my counseling practice with Catherine's excellent writing skills has led to this series of four novels. In the lives of the characters you'll meet in these pages, you will see the choices I have observed people making over and over again through the years, the value of caring friends and neighbors, and the hope of marriages moving to a new and more pleasant season.

In *Winter Turns to Spring* and the other stories in the Four Seasons fiction series, you will meet newlyweds, blended families, couples who are deep in the throes of empty-nest adjustment, and senior couples. Our hope is that you will see yourself or someone you know in these characters. If you are hurting, this book can give you hope—and some ideas for making things better. Be sure to check out the discussion questions at the end of the book for further ideas.

And whatever season you're in, I know you'll enjoy the people and the stories in Deepwater Cove.

Gary D. Chapman, PhD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people affect the writing and publication of a novel. I wish to publicly express my deep appreciation for Dr. Gary Chapman. His God-given wisdom and his amazing books have enriched both my writing and my personal life beyond measure. I'm so grateful to have been given this opportunity to partner with a true gentleman, a man who reveals his commitment to God in all he does.

For sharing both laughter and tears, my longtime friends are treasures I cherish. Janice, Mary, Sharon, Roxie, Kristie, BB, and Lucia, I love you. My prayer support team holds me up before God, and I can't thank you enough, Mary, Andrew, Nina, and Marilyn.

I also thank my Tyndale family for all you have meant to me during these past ten years. Ron Beers and Karen Watson, bless you for making this series a reality. Kathy Olson, I can't imagine having the courage to write a single word without you. Your careful editing and precious friendship are truly gifts from the Lord. Thanks from the bottom of my heart to Andrea and Babette in marketing, along with the public relations department, the amazing sales team, and the wonderful design department.

Though I often leave them for last, first on my list of supporters, encouragers, and loved ones are my family. Tim, Geoffrey, and Andrei, I love you so much.

Catherine Palmer



CHAPTER ONE

Brad Hanes walked across the parking lot toward Larry's Lake Lounge with one goal in mind—and she would be sitting at the far end of the bar. Yvonne Ratcliff, the tavern's entertainer, had a rich, earthy voice that welled out, filled the crowded, smoky room, and strummed every sinew of Brad's body.

Aware that his wife wasn't fond of Yvonne—or the other regulars at Larry's—he had debated letting his coworkers from the construction site go on without him. In December, the water's surface at Lake of the Ozarks reflected the ice-gray sky. The wind whipping across the town of Tranquility bit right through his denim jacket. It wouldn't be a good night to stay out late, Brad knew. Still, nothing sounded better than a few brews, some laughs with his friends, and a couple of hours shooting pool while listening to music.

"You sure Ashley won't mind us hanging out at Larry's for a while?" Mack Lang, another member of the construction crew, ambled alongside Brad. "My number-two ex wanted me home for dinner at six every night on the dot. She about suffocated me with all her rules and regulations."

“Nah.” Brad shook his head. “Ashley’s probably not even at the house. She started that sideline business selling necklaces, remember?”

“Them homemade beads?”

“Yeah, and with Christmas just around the corner, she’s working day and night to fill orders.”

“Still clocking in at the country club, too?”

“Sure. Ashley’s not giving up that job.” As he and his friend neared the tavern, Brad reflected on his wife—her black-and-white waitress outfit clean and pressed, her long red hair wound up in a bun, and her pale neck stacked with beaded necklaces she’d made.

Ashley would know her husband planned to go to Larry’s this evening, though she’d asked him a hundred times to steer clear of the place. She complained that Brad drank too much, came home smelling like a dirty ashtray, and always went off to work the next day with a headache. Some of what she said was true, though he argued that he didn’t see anything wrong with having a few beers with his friends.

“She probably wouldn’t even notice if I did come home,” Brad said, a surge of frustration filling his chest. “I’m a plain guy, you know. I don’t ask much of a wife—a clean house, the laundry done, and three squares. With the necklace production going full steam, Ashley can hardly stay focused enough to tie her own shoes. She never fixes my supper anymore. I have to scrounge up a can of soup or a box of macaroni. Pretty pitiful after a long day building condos in the middle of a Missouri winter.”

“Welcome to the club,” Mack said. “I hated marriage, but I hate being a bachelor, too. I guess you’ll have to find your fun wherever you can. Speaking of which . . . sounds like Yvonne is on stage.”

Brad tried not to react to the comment, undoubtedly a reference to the growing attraction between himself and the singer. He hadn’t realized it was so obvious.

Yvonne—or *Why-vonne*, as she pronounced it—had a beautiful

voice, and she was easy on the eyes, too. She had a kid, she'd told Brad, but childbearing hadn't hurt her figure any. With her long brown hair, black-rimmed green eyes, and skintight jeans, she could do things with her voice that kept every male eye in the place riveted.

But Yvonne's focus was always on Brad. Every song she belted out was aimed straight at him, and when she took her usual place at the end of the bar, he couldn't do anything but amble over and buy her a drink or two.

Reaching for the door, Brad heard Yvonne launch into a familiar song about the joys of being a redneck woman. But as he pulled on the handle, another sound sent shivers up his back. The high-pitched wail began as a sharp "*Yow!*" and then ebbed into a pathetic "*wow, wow, wow.*" Brad turned toward the noise, and it started again.

"*Yow! Wow, wow, wow.*" After a moment, the sequence ended with a softly muttered "*ow.*"

"What in the—?" Brad took off his ball cap and scratched his forehead as he studied the rapidly filling parking lot.

"Sounds like a baby crying," Mack said as the two men took tentative steps in the direction of the wails.

"No way. Who would leave a kid out in this cold? Things like that happen in big cities, not here."

"*Yi! Why, why, why, why?*" the voice howled. "*Nee-ow-rah. Boo-rah-rah.*"

"Hey!" Brad called out. "Who's there?"

Though it was only a little after five in the afternoon, the light was so dim he could hardly see. He dropped his cap onto his head again and adjusted the brim.

"Lookit." Mack elbowed him. "Over there."

At the corner of the brick wall that edged Larry's Lake Lounge sat a cardboard box. And it was moving.

Colder than the evening breeze, a chill zipped down Brad's spine. He and Mack neared the box. Brad noted blue and red lettering that

indicated it once had held beer cans. As he peered inside, a pair of large brown eyes looked up at him.

“Wow!” The tiny mouth displayed two rows of sharp white teeth as it cut the air with a piercing “*Woe, woe, woe!*”

“Holy moley,” Mack said. “It’s some kind of critter.”

Relief flooding his chest, Brad hunkered down beside the box. “What are you anyhow?” he asked the lump of dusty gray fur. “You a raccoon? Or a kitten? You’re putting up a mighty big fuss; that’s for sure.”

“Don’t touch it,” Mack warned. “You could get bit and die of rabies.”

“*Yi! Yi! Yi!*” The creature tried to turn around, bumped into the side of the box, and then lifted its head to howl. “*A-woo! Oooo! Yow, yow, yow.*”

“Rabies,” Brad muttered. He reached into the box and slipped his hand under the soft, downy belly. Cupping the animal, he made a cursory examination. Ears, eyes, tail, snout, fuzzy legs, and four paws.

“It’s a puppy,” he pronounced. “And the talkingest one I’ve ever met.”

“*Yawp.*” The little head darted forward and a small pink tongue licked Brad’s nose.

“Agh, not that!” Brad wiped away the moisture with the back of his hand. He flipped the puppy over and determined he was holding a male. “Who left you here, fella? You must be freezing.”

“Brother,” Mack said in disgust. “You gotta be some kind of jerk to dump a puppy in weather like this.”

Brad knew that Missouri country folks often didn’t have the means to get their pets fixed. That meant thousands of mixed-breed, unwanted puppies and kittens were abandoned on the roadside each year. Animal shelters and city pounds usually picked them up, but many starved, were killed by larger predators, or got hit by cars.

“At least they put him near a public place,” Brad observed. “I guess they figured he’d find a home.”

“He ain’t finding a home with me.”

“Me neither.”

The jukebox started up inside the tavern. Yvonne must have finished her song set and would be taking her usual place at the bar. Married nearly a year now, Brad knew he shouldn’t give the woman a second thought. The sultry songbird was older than Brad by several years, and she had been around the block a few times. She told him she had tried to make it in the Nashville music scene but found the going too rough. She had sung backup at one of the big shows in Branson for a while too. But eventually she came home to the lake area—single, sexy, and looking for a good time. That siren call was getting harder to resist by the day.

“Wow!” The sharp yelp startled Brad. The pup had curled up in the crook of his elbow. “*Ick, ick, ick.*”

“What are you talking about now, you little yapper?” Brad murmured as he stroked the matted fur. Pressing his small head against the man’s palm, the dog expressed his delight in human touch. Brad grinned. “What do you want, boy? Huh?”

“Uh-oh,” Mack said. “You’re starting to sound like a sucker.”

“I’m not taking him home. But still . . . he can’t be more than a couple of months old.”

“I bet he’s barely off his mama’s milk. We had dogs when I was growing up. You shouldn’t take ’em from the mother too soon.”

“I always wanted a dog. My dad ran off strays with a shotgun.”

Though the puppy appealed to some tender place inside him, Brad knew things were going so badly with Ashley that it would be a mistake to arrive home with a puppy. She’d probably pack up her beads and run back to mama and daddy. Which might be a good idea after all.

Brad wasn’t looking for a relationship with Yvonne or any of the other attractive young women who made Larry’s their regular

watering hole. He didn't want Ashley to leave him, either. But how long could two people go on this way? Chilly silence interspersed with arguments. Blame. Name-calling. Accusations.

Sex was a rare occurrence in the marriage too, and that didn't sit well with Brad. Before their wedding, Ashley couldn't get enough of him—and vice versa. Lately, they hardly had time for a kiss. With him working days and her working nights, they were rarely even in bed at the same time. You couldn't expect a twenty-two-year-old man in the prime of life to forgo that kind of pleasure. Pleasure? No, it was a *need*.

“*Brrrrp . . . brrrrp . . .*”

Brad glanced down to find that the puppy was snoring softly. “Great. He went to sleep.”

“What did you expect? Probably been out here freezing most of the day.” Mack gave a snort. “Might as well take him home. You know you want to.”

“I don't want a dog. But how can I put him back in that cardboard box? We'll walk out of Larry's in a couple of hours and find him frozen stiff.”

Brad couldn't imagine abandoning the dog to the ice-cold air and stepping into the warmth of the bar without wearing guilt like a chain around his neck. He wanted to head inside, settle down next to Yvonne, and smell that perfume she wore. She'd start flirting with him, and he'd buy her a few drinks. Then she would saunter back onto the stage and sing to him until he was so woozy with beer and temptation he could hardly stumble to his car.

He had a feeling it wouldn't be long before he gave in. *Whyvonne the Con*, most of the men called the sensuous songstress. It was no secret that Yvonne used her looks and her wiles to get what she wanted out of a man. But at this point, Brad hardly cared. He wanted the same thing. A little fun. No strings. No expectations. No responsibilities. It all sounded good to him.

“*Brrrrp . . . brrrrp . . . brrrrp.*”

His hand on the puppy's head, Brad studied the front of Larry's. Three or four couples had gone inside since he first picked up the pup.

"Someone else will find the dog and take it home," Brad told his friend. "We're not responsible for the mangy little mutt. Come on."

Without allowing himself time to think, he set the puppy back inside the box and yanked open Larry's front door.

"Yow!" The terrified shriek tore through Brad's brain and went straight to his heart. "Yow-wow, yow-wow! Owooooo!"

With a muttered curse, Brad bent over, scooped up the dog, tucked it under his jacket, and headed for his car. He could hear Mack laughing behind him.

"Sucker!" his friend called. "I'll tell Yvonne hi for you!"

Gritting his teeth, Brad opened his car door. This was a mistake. A big, big mistake. He and Ashley didn't have room for a dog in their small house. They didn't have a fenced yard. No one could look after the puppy while they were at work. The whole thing was a very bad idea.

He plopped the puppy onto the passenger's seat. Maybe someone in the neighborhood would take the animal. He slid in and started the motor. Jaw tight, he drove out of the parking lot and onto the short stretch of road that led down to Deepwater Cove. This was not what he wanted to be doing. Maybe Ashley was right and he shouldn't spend so much time around Yvonne and the other bar patrons, but why should he have to go home and watch TV alone all night?

The pressure of four paws warmed his thigh, and Brad looked down to find the puppy settling comfortably on his lap. *No*, he thought. He didn't want a dog. Or a wife, a home, a job, a steady paycheck.

At one time, those things had seemed like impossibly lofty goals. His chaotic childhood had made such dreams seem unattainable. But he had found Ashley, won her heart, bought a house, married the

woman he loved, and settled into his work and a life he had expected to be wonderful.

It wasn't.

Now things were coming apart fast, and he shouldn't be taking home a dog. The mutt would require a long-term commitment, and that was exactly what Brad had been wanting to escape.

"Brrrp . . . brrrp . . . brrrp . . ."

The puppy's gentle snoring calmed Brad's nerves as he pulled into the driveway. Leafless branches widened the view during the winter months, and Brad saw moonlight glitter on the lake like dancing fireflies.

The dog barely stirred as Brad climbed out of the car and carried him toward the house. Ashley had left every light on, as usual. The girl blamed him for their money troubles, but the real fault lay at her feet. All those beads. And plastic bags. And boxes. And postage. Did she have any idea how much cash she ran through every month on her little necklace business?

Once inside, Brad saw that the house was pretty much the way he had left it early that morning. Ashley hadn't washed a dish, swept, vacuumed, or even put away the groceries she must have bought during the day. He studied the array of canned vegetables, cake mixes, and jars of spaghetti sauce on the kitchen counter.

Ashley's parents ran a hot dog and ice cream shop in Camdenon, and that was about the only food she knew how to fix. Her friend Esther Moore had been teaching her to cook real food, but Mrs. Moore had passed away at Thanksgiving. Now Brad couldn't even mention the old woman's name without Ashley dissolving into a puddle of tears. And his wife had abandoned all efforts to learn to prepare tasty, hearty meals from scratch.

Still cradling the exhausted puppy, he rooted around in the freezer until he found some turkey casserole left over from who knew when. He heated it in the microwave, placed a small helping on a sau-

cer, filled a bowl with fresh water, and set everything down on the floor.

Without pause, the little critter stepped onto the saucer, waded right into the warm casserole, and began to wolf it down. Unable to keep from laughing, Brad grabbed a fork, seated himself beside the dog, and dug into what was left in the container. Now and then, the dog would look up and wag his tail before returning to his dinner.

That's what's missing around this house, Brad thought. *A little appreciation. A few kind words of affirmation.* The least Ashley could do was thank him for the hours of work he put in every day on the construction site. Besides that, many afternoons he *did* avoid the bar to come home and work with Esther's husband. Charlie Moore and Brad were finishing a new addition to the house and spiffing up the rest of the place. They'd been painting, repairing cracks in the ceiling where the roof had leaked, caulking the bathtub and sinks, and weatherproofing the windows and doors.

At least the puppy noticed what he had been given and was grateful. After a long drink of water, the mutt clambered into Brad's lap and joined him in polishing off the rest of the turkey casserole. Oddly enough, Brad didn't mind the little black snout rooting around the corners of the glass dish.

"We're two of a kind, huh, pal?" he told the dog. "Someone dumped you into a box in the parking lot. And I'm left here night after night in an empty house by the lake. We both got abandoned by people we thought loved us. Stinks, doesn't it?"

The puppy sat down in the empty baking dish and leaned against Brad's chest. "You planning to take another nap? Well, I guess I'll join you. Might as well. Nothing else to do around here."

Brad picked up the dog and set the pan in the sink along with the other empty plates, glasses, and pots. Then he dropped down onto the sofa. After unlacing his work boots, he kicked them off and stretched out on the saggy cushions. The remote control was out of

reach, and he considered rising to get it. But the puppy had already made a nest in the crook of Brad's arm.

"Brrrrp . . . brrrrp . . . brrrrp . . ."

Chuckling, Brad wrapped his hands around the filthy little fur ball and closed his eyes. Ashley would have a fit when she walked into the house sometime after midnight. But at least he wasn't at Larry's. He hadn't even popped open a beer. And he certainly wasn't gazing at Yvonne Ratcliff with thoughts that embarrassed even himself.



Ashley struggled to stay awake as she steered her old, battered Honda along the curving tree-lined highway toward Deepwater Cove. Borrow ditches bordered the two narrow lanes, and she knew how easy it would be to drop a wheel off the pavement and flip the vehicle. Names of three of her classmates from Camdenton High School marked homemade crosses perched on a slope along this path. She didn't want her parents to weep as they decorated a cross with roses and ivy at the place where she had perished.

The thought of death brought Esther Moore to the forefront of Ashley's mind, and she couldn't prevent the tears that spilled down her cheeks. Though two weeks had passed since the stroke that took her friend's life, Ashley still couldn't believe Esther was gone. Oddly, it comforted her to cry inside the warm, silent car where no one could see.

Brad hated his wife's emotional outbursts—of any kind. And rather than comforting her or cuddling her in his arms, as he had at the start of their relationship, he now told her to shake it off. Get over it. Snap out of it. As though recovering from death could ever be that easy.

Sniffing, Ashley turned the car into the Deepwater Cove neighborhood. She'd once been so eager to get home she could hardly keep her foot from pressing too hard on the gas pedal. In her imagination,

the little house she and Brad had chosen seemed to sit like a cozy cottage by the lake just waiting for their loving touch. The rooms would wear coats of softly glowing paint. Quaint antiques and pretty curtains would dress them up. Outside, gardens of foxgloves, petunias, and geraniums would welcome guests.

“Piece of junk,” she muttered as she parked beside Brad’s car in what was once the graveled driveway—now a patch of shriveled weeds. “I hate this house. Leaky windows. Stupid wall heater. Freezing floors. Termites.”

The sight of the burrowing pests had been their first indication of trouble. Neither had thought to ask for an inspection before they bought the place. Ridding the house of termites had cost an arm and a leg, and Ashley still got a crawly feeling when she was home alone.

Which she usually was.

Pushing open the front door, she spotted her husband stretched out on the sofa. He’d probably been drinking, as usual. He usually fell asleep on their couch, the TV on and his smelly work boots lying haphazardly on the stained carpet.

Ashley set her purse on the floor near the door and shrugged out of her coat. Tonight her darling husband hadn’t even managed to turn on the television. She swallowed, wondering who Brad had been sitting with at Larry’s. The few times they went to the bar together, she noted jealous looks from several of the women who frequented the place. The very idea that her husband might take up with one of them nauseated her.

After stepping out of her black work shoes, Ashley padded across the floor toward the kitchen. Though she worked at a restaurant, she was always hungry when she got home. Seeing the pile of dishes in the sink, her heart fell. Didn’t Brad understand how busy she was—working like a maniac to get all her necklace orders filled before Christmas as well as laboring nearly forty hours a week at the country club? Couldn’t the man lift a finger in the kitchen?

“*Brrrp . . . brrrp . . . brrrp . . .*”

Ashley paused at the counter bar dividing the kitchen from the living room. That didn’t sound like Brad’s usual snore. This was deeper and stuffy with congestion. Despite her irritation, she felt an instant stab of worry. What if her husband was sick? In some strange way, she almost wished he would be. Then she could make him some chicken noodle soup and cuddle up with him on the couch. He wouldn’t be able to go to Larry’s, and they’d be together like in the old days before things turned lousy.

“*Brrrp . . . brrrp . . . brrrp . . .*”

Concerned, she tiptoed back across the room to where he lay. It was hard to see in the faint moonlight that filtered through the window. Ashley usually left on one light—or more—when she went out. She hated coming home to a dark house. Brad’s snoring disturbed her, though it came regularly with each breath.

Kneeling beside the sofa, she leaned over and turned her ear to his chest.

“*Barp?*”

At the yelp, something damp, furry, and ratlike moved against her cheek. With a shriek, she tumbled backward onto her heels and hit the floor with a thud.

Brad shot up off the couch.

“What?” he blurted out, his eyes bleary. “What is it?”

“It’s *me*.” Ashley reached over and switched on a lamp. “Who did you think it was? What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with me? You’re the one who’s screaming.”

“What was that thing?” She shuddered. “There was something lying on you, Brad. I felt it.”

“Oh no.” He leaped up and began throwing pillows off the couch. “Where’d he go? Come here, boy!”

Ashley got to her feet as Brad worked his way around the living room, looking behind the sofa and lifting the curtain hems off the floor.

“What are you *doing?*” She felt a familiar choking sensation rise in her chest. “Bradley Hanes, how much did you drink tonight?”

Straightening, he looked her in the eye. “I did not drink a single beer. And for your information, there is a puppy hiding somewhere in this house, and you had better help me find him.”

“A *puppy?*”

“*Wow!*” The sharp, high-pitched yelp sounded from the kitchen. “*Wow, wow, wow!*”

Spinning around, Ashley barely beat her husband past the bar. As she came to a halt, she spotted a small, shapeless mound of matted, dirty fur seated beside a puddle on the floor. From somewhere beneath the fur, a tail began to wag.

“Aw, man!” Brad pushed past her and scooped up the creature. His voice softened as he stroked the puppy’s head. “That’s a great way to introduce yourself, you little yapper. What’s she gonna think now, huh? She’ll boot you right out the front door, and then what will happen to you?”

Ashley stared at her cooing husband, a state of mild shock numbing her senses as he cradled the puppy in one hand and ripped off a length of paper towel with the other. A few quick swipes, a spray of disinfectant, and that spot of linoleum floor was cleaner than it had been in weeks.

Who is this man?

“You planning to be nice now?” Brad asked the wad of tangled hair. He held it up and pointed its wet black nose toward his face. “You can’t mess on the floor, pooch, you hear me? You have to let us know when you want to go outside. Like this.”

In his stocking feet, Brad strode into the living room, knelt on the floor, and lifted the puppy’s paw to the door. First he demonstrated by scratching the wood himself. Then he put the dog’s nails against the door and they practiced a few times.

“See?” he murmured, his cheek pressed against the gray fluff. “That’s how you do it. No puddling, piddling, or anything else inside

the house. If you can't figure out the rules pretty fast, kiddo, you'll have to go back to the box in the parking lot. You don't want that, do you? I didn't think so. You be a good boy."

So exhausted she felt as if she were dreaming, Ashley watched her husband—muscle-bound former football jock, deeply tanned construction worker, beer-guzzling good-time man—kiss a dog right on the nose.

Looking up at his wife, Brad gave her a lopsided grin.

"What do you think?" he asked, holding out the puppy. "Pretty cute, huh? Is he a keeper?"

Ashley studied the man she had married, the man who had disappointed and failed her in nearly every way possible. Blue eyes soft, he rubbed his hand over the puppy's matted fur.

Was there anything left between them? Anything worth saving?

The dog sighed and settled into the crook of Brad's arm. In a moment, its eyes closed.

"Brrrp . . . brrrp . . . brrrp . . ."

The gentle snore brought the hint of a smile to Ashley's lips. She nodded as she gazed at her husband. "He's a keeper."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The principles and strategies illustrated in this novel are taken from *The Four Seasons of Marriage* by Gary Chapman. In this book, Dr. Chapman discusses marriage as a journey back and forth through different “seasons.”

- **Springtime** in marriage is a time of new beginnings, new patterns of life, new ways of listening, and new ways of loving.
 - **Summer** couples share deep commitment, satisfaction, and security in each other’s love.
 - **Fall** brings a sense of unwanted change, and nagging emptiness appears.
 - **Winter** means difficulty. Marriage is harder in this season of cold silence and bitter winds.
1. In *Winter Turns to Spring*, which season of the year is it in Deepwater Cove, Missouri? Which season are Brad and Ashley Hanes experiencing in their marriage? How can you tell?
 2. During the Bible study starting on p. 77, the men discuss their marriages and other relationships. Which season are Brenda and Steve Hansen in? Which season are Kim and Derek Finley in? How is Charlie feeling about Esther? What does he think of Bitty?
 3. Have you ever had a mentor to help you learn a skill or in some other way? Who is Brad’s mentor? Who is Ashley’s mentor? How has each of these mentors influenced the young couple? Can you think of anyone you could mentor?
 4. Strategy 1 in *The Four Seasons of Marriage* challenges couples to deal with past failures. Failure alone will not destroy a marriage, but unconfessed and unforgiven failure will. Couples are urged to identify past failures, to confess and repent, and finally to forgive. How has Brad failed Ashley? How does Ashley fail Brad? When does each of them identify their failure? When does each confess it? When do they forgive each other? How do Brad and Ashley deal with disappointments and failures at the start of the story? How do they handle them later in the book?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Catherine Palmer lives in Missouri with her husband, Tim, and sons, Geoffrey and Andrei. She is a graduate of Southwest Baptist University and holds a master's degree in English from Baylor University. Her first book was published in 1988. Since then she has published over forty novels and won numerous awards for her writing, including the Christy Award—the highest honor in Christian fiction—in 2001 for *A Touch of Betrayal*. In 2004, she was given the Career Achievement Award for Inspirational Romance by *Romantic Times BOOKreviews* magazine. More than 2 million copies of Catherine's novels are currently in print.

Dr. Gary Chapman is the author of *The Four Seasons of Marriage*, the perennial best seller *The Five Love Languages* (over 4 million copies sold), and numerous other marriage and family books. He is a senior associate pastor, an internationally known speaker, and the host of *A Love Language Minute*, a syndicated radio program heard on more than 200 stations across North America. He and his wife, Karolyn, live in North Carolina.