

# **The Cozy Seasons Winter at Home**

**by *Amy Maryon***



# The Cozy Seasons:

## Winter at Home

*Devotions, Stories, Activities, and Recipes for Simple Family Moments*

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# Chapter 1: A Season of Rest

## Scripture Reading

### **Psalm 23:1–3 (NLT)**

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.*

### **Matthew 11:28–30 (AMP)**

*"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavily burdened [by religious rituals that provide no peace], and I will give you rest [refreshing your souls with salvation]. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me [following Me as My disciple], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest (renewal, blessed quiet) for your souls. For My yoke is easy [to bear] and My burden is light."*

### **Isaiah 30:15 (NLT)**

*This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength. But you would have none of it."*

## Devotional

Winter has always carried a hush that no other season quite matches. After the sparkle and swirl of Christmas lights, the bustle of shopping, cooking, and gathering, the new year drifts in quietly — almost like a soft blanket being laid across the earth. The days are shorter, the evenings longer, and for many of us, there is a natural invitation to slow down, draw inward, and breathe.

But slowing down doesn't always come naturally. If you're like me, you might feel uncomfortable with quiet. There's always another load of laundry, another meal to plan, another appointment or errand or project that seems more urgent than pausing.

I sometimes catch myself filling every empty space with noise — scrolling my phone, planning the next day, mentally rehearsing worries I can't control. Yet when I open my Bible, I see that rest is not only a gift from God; it's a command and a necessity.

Psalms 23 paints one of the most beautiful pictures in Scripture: the Shepherd leading His sheep to green meadows and still waters, restoring their strength. What strikes me most is that the sheep aren't responsible for finding those places of peace — the Shepherd is. The sheep's role is simply to follow. That truth humbles me. How often I exhaust myself trying to make life peaceful on my own, forgetting that the One who knows me best has already offered to guide me.

In Matthew 11, Jesus speaks directly to the weary: "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Notice His words — He doesn't say "work harder and you'll find rest," or "once everything is in order, then I'll let you rest." He invites the weary just as they are. That means you and I don't have to prove ourselves worthy of rest. We don't have to earn it. We only have to come.

And yet, this is where many of us struggle. We live in a culture that glorifies productivity, where worth is measured by accomplishments. It's easy to believe the lie that stopping means falling behind. But rest in God's design is not laziness. It is trust. When I put aside my endless striving and pause in His presence, I am declaring, "Lord, I believe You are enough. I believe You can handle what I cannot." That kind of surrender takes courage.

Isaiah 30:15 says, "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength." I love that pairing — quietness and confidence. We often think strength is about pushing harder, but God says true strength comes from quiet trust.

Think of a snow-covered field: silent, still, yet beneath the frozen ground, new life is forming. Winter may look barren on the surface, but it's a season of preparation. Could it be that God uses the quieter months of our lives the same way? I've learned that rest is not always about a long vacation or an empty schedule. Sometimes it looks like small moments of stillness that remind me I am cared for. Lighting a candle in the evening and sitting with Scripture. Sipping tea by the window and watching the trees sway. Pausing long enough to notice the sound of a child's laughter or the warmth of a blanket. These aren't wasted minutes; they are holy pauses that tune my heart back to the Shepherd.

There was a time I thought rest meant doing nothing, and that felt impossible with a house full of children and responsibilities. But now I see that rest often means doing less of what drains and more of what restores. It might mean turning off the constant stream of news or notifications. It might mean saying no to something good in order to make space for what is better. It might even mean sitting quietly with open hands and whispering, "Lord, I give this day back to You."

If you find yourself entering this season weary, I want to encourage you: God sees you. He knows the burdens you carry, even the ones you don't say aloud. And He isn't asking you to push harder. He's inviting you to lay it all down, to let Him carry what you were never meant to hold alone. Winter is the perfect reminder of that — a season when creation itself slows, when days are shorter and nights longer, when even the trees seem to rest. Maybe God is giving you the same invitation.

Let this winter be your season of rest — not just physically, but spiritually. Rest in His promises. Rest in His presence. Rest in the truth that you are loved, not for what you do, but for who you are in Him. When you choose to rest, you're not falling behind. You're stepping into the rhythm God designed for your soul — a rhythm of work and rest, trust and renewal, quietness and confidence.

So light that candle, pull the blanket a little tighter, and open your heart to the Shepherd who restores. His rest is not just the absence of work; it's the presence of peace. And He offers it freely to you today.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. What does rest look like for you in this season of life?
2. Do you find it hard to slow down? Why do you think that is?
3. Which Scripture from this chapter speaks most to your heart right now?
4. What small "holy pause" could you add to your daily routine this winter?
5. How can you invite your family to embrace a slower rhythm with you?
6. What burden are you carrying that you need to surrender to God?

## **A Season of Rest**

The wind outside had quieted after a night of moaning through the bare branches, rattling the shutters, and sweeping across the frozen fields. Morning came slowly in the prairie winter, the pale light of dawn spreading across the snow with a muted glow. Inside the small farmhouse, the air was cool, though not nearly as biting as it had been outside. The last embers of the fire had faded to a soft red in the stove, and already Father was stirring to coax the flames back to life.

The children still slept under heavy quilts in the loft, tucked close together for warmth. Downstairs, Mother moved softly, her steps practiced and steady, the wool of her dress brushing quietly against the floorboards. She set the coffeepot on the stove and stirred the porridge that had soaked overnight in the iron pot. The scent of oats and a touch of molasses began to fill the room, and soon the home felt less like a drafty shelter against the winter and more like a haven.

The pace of winter days was always slower. In the summer, every morning was hurried with chores, planting, and tending to livestock. But in January, much of that work fell away. The animals needed care, yes, but the fields were quiet. The earth itself seemed to rest, and so the family followed its rhythm.

There was no rush to rise before the sun in these cold months. The darkness lingered long into the morning, and so the family learned to savor those extra minutes of sleep, tucked under quilts Mother had pieced together from scraps of worn-out dresses and shirts. The quilts themselves told stories — one patch the faded blue of Father's work shirt, another the soft pink of a dress once worn to church, another a bit of calico traded from a neighbor. Each stitch was a reminder of the years gone by, of hands that worked and days that passed, all now covering the children with warmth as they dreamed.

When the fire had caught and the warmth began to spread, Father went to the door to check the world outside. His boots crunched across the packed snow on the porch, the sound echoing in the stillness. The air was so crisp it seemed to sting with each breath, and smoke from the chimney curled upward into the pale sky. Beyond the fences, the fields lay bare and quiet, blanketed in white. It was a stillness that carried a weight of peace, as if all of creation had stopped its labors for a time.

The children tumbled down from the loft when Mother's call finally reached them, their faces pink from sleep and the chill. They rubbed their eyes, their hair tousled, and quickly found places at the table. Wooden bowls were filled with steaming porridge, and the children stirred in a spoonful of cream or drizzled a bit of honey when it was available. There was no feast on the table, but in that small room with the fire glowing and the scent of warm oats rising with the steam, it felt like abundance.

The long winter days were not wasted, though they moved at a slower pace. After breakfast, Father often mended tools or sharpened the ax. The older boys hauled wood from the pile, their breath coming in white puffs as they carried the logs back inside. Mother's hands were never idle — she patched clothing, darned socks, or pieced together more quilt squares while the younger children played nearby. Sometimes she read aloud from the worn family Bible, her voice steady and calm, filling the silence with words of hope.

There were chores, yes, but not the frantic kind that summer demanded. Winter was the time for mending, for sewing, for fixing what had been set aside during the busy months. It was the time for storing away lessons as well as supplies — Father teaching the boys how to whittle handles for tools, Mother showing the girls how to stitch strong seams that would last. The quiet hours became classrooms, where wisdom was passed hand to hand and voice to ear.

In the evenings, when darkness came early, the family gathered close by the fire. Candles were used sparingly, but the glow of lamplight was enough to see by. The children sat on the braided rug with books or slates, scratching sums and practicing letters. Mother rocked the baby in her arms, humming softly, while Father's voice carried as he read aloud from a storybook or Scripture passage.

The house itself was not large, yet in winter it seemed to grow smaller still — the family tucked together in the same room, the outside world unreachable for days at a time when storms swept through. But instead of feeling confined, the closeness deepened their bond. They shared stories, sang hymns in quiet voices, and listened to the wind howl outside as if it were far away, unable to touch them in their little circle of light.

Rest, for them, was not idleness. It was a season of preparation, of drawing close to one another, and of finding joy in the simple work of their hands. The world outside may have looked barren and lifeless, but inside the home, life continued in warmth and steadiness.

When storms came, as they often did, the family drew even closer. Snow piled against the door, and the wind shrieked across the open land, but inside the stove glowed and the air was thick with the smell of stew simmering. The children pressed their noses to the windowpanes, tracing frost patterns with their fingers and marveling at how the world disappeared into white. Later, they would settle by the fire, bellies full and blankets wrapped tight, and listen as Father told stories of winters past.

There was a rhythm to these days, and while the children sometimes grew restless, they learned the value of it. They learned patience in the long stretches of quiet, gratitude in the small pleasures, and contentment in the ordinary. Rest was not something they chased; it was something they received — a gift given in the slower pace of winter.

Mother often reminded them that even the earth itself rested. The fields needed the long months of stillness to be ready for spring planting. Seeds buried deep beneath the soil were gathering strength, unseen but alive, preparing for the day they would push through the frost into sunlight. "God made it this way," she would say, her needle moving steadily through fabric. "Rest comes before growth. Quiet comes before song."

And so the children came to see winter not as wasted time, but as holy time. They remembered the warmth of quilts, the crackle of the fire, the taste of hot bread and honey, the sound of hymns rising in the lamplight. Years later, when they were grown and scattered, those memories stayed with them. The world outside had been harsh and unyielding, but inside their small home, they had learned what it meant to rest, and what it meant to be at peace.

The prairie winters were long, and often difficult. But in that season of rest, the family found strength. They found that quietness was not emptiness, but fullness of another kind — the fullness of time well-spent, of hearts drawn close, of faith rooted deeper. And when spring came at last, with its rush of work and planting, they stepped into it with renewed spirits, ready to labor again because they had first learned to be still.

## Comfort Foods

### 1. Creamy Turkey & Wild Rice Soup

There's something about soup that makes you breathe a little slower. It's not a grab-and-go kind of meal — you have to let it simmer, you have to wait, and then you sit down with a steaming bowl and it forces you to pause. That's why I love this recipe after the holidays. You can use leftover turkey, or even chicken, and it feels like you're stretching what you have into something beautiful and comforting.

#### Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ cup wild rice, rinsed
- 6 cups chicken or turkey broth
- 2 cups cooked turkey, shredded
- 1 cup milk or half-and-half
- 2 Tbsp flour
- ½ tsp dried thyme
- Salt and black pepper to taste

#### Directions

1. Melt butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery; sauté 5 minutes until softened.
2. Stir in garlic and cook 1 minute more.
3. Add the wild rice and broth. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat, cover, and simmer for about 45 minutes or until rice is tender.
4. Stir in turkey. In a small bowl, whisk flour into the milk until smooth; slowly pour into soup, stirring constantly.
5. Cook another 5–10 minutes until creamy. Season with thyme, salt, and pepper.

## 2. Rustic Oatmeal Molasses Bread

When the house feels quiet and gray outside, this bread brings life right back into the kitchen. The smell alone could lift a weary heart. I like to slice it thick while it's still warm and spread a little butter across the top. It reminds me that rest can be as simple as taking time to enjoy something homemade.

### Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups boiling water
- 1 cup rolled oats
- 2 Tbsp butter
- ½ cup molasses
- 1 ½ tsp salt
- 1 packet (2 ¼ tsp) active dry yeast
- ½ cup warm water
- 4–5 cups all-purpose flour

### Directions

1. In a bowl, pour boiling water over oats, butter, molasses, and salt. Let cool to lukewarm.
2. In another bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water; let sit until foamy.
3. Combine yeast mixture with oat mixture. Stir in flour, one cup at a time, until dough forms.
4. Knead on a floured surface for 8–10 minutes until smooth.
5. Place in a greased bowl, cover, and let rise 1 hour.
6. Punch down, shape into two loaves, and place in greased loaf pans.
7. Let rise again, 30–40 minutes. Bake at 375°F for 35 minutes.

### **3. Baked Pears with Honey & Cinnamon**

Winter doesn't have to mean heavy desserts. These pears are light, warm, and just sweet enough. They feel old-fashioned, like something a grandmother would quietly slip onto the table at the end of supper. You don't fuss much with them, yet everyone feels cared for when they take that first bite.

#### **Ingredients**

- 4 ripe pears, halved and cored
- 2 Tbsp honey
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts or pecans
- Vanilla yogurt or whipped cream, optional

#### **Directions**

1. Place pears cut side up in a baking dish.
  2. Drizzle with honey and sprinkle with cinnamon and nuts.
  3. Bake at 350°F for 25–30 minutes until tender.
  4. Serve warm, topped with a spoonful of yogurt or whipped cream.
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### **4. Warm Chai Latte (Homemade Spice Mix)**

Sometimes winter afternoons feel long, especially when the sun slips down early. That's when I love to make a chai latte. The house fills with the scent of cinnamon and ginger, and suddenly everything feels softer. This is a recipe to sip slowly, maybe while you journal or read aloud to the kids.

#### **Ingredients**

- 2 cups water
- 2 black tea bags
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 whole cloves
- 3 cardamom pods, crushed
- 1-inch piece fresh ginger, sliced
- 2 cups milk
- 2–3 Tbsp sugar or honey

#### **Directions**

1. Bring water, spices, and ginger to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes.
2. Add tea bags; steep 5 minutes. Remove spices and tea.
3. Stir in milk and sweetener. Heat until steaming, not boiling.
4. Pour into mugs and enjoy warm.

## 5. Skillet Herbed Biscuits

I always say biscuits are the quickest way to make a meal feel special. Drop them in a cast-iron skillet, let them puff up golden, and watch how everyone gathers a little faster around the table. These are simple, savory, and perfect for soaking up the last bit of soup in your bowl.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp dried parsley or rosemary
- ½ cup cold butter, cubed
- ¾ cup milk

### Directions

1. In a bowl, whisk flour, baking powder, salt, garlic powder, and herbs.
  2. Cut in butter with a pastry cutter until mixture looks crumbly.
  3. Stir in milk just until combined.
  4. Drop spoonfuls of dough into a buttered cast-iron skillet.
  5. Bake at 425°F for 15 minutes until golden.
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## 6. Winter Vegetable Hash

This recipe reminds me that rest also means using what you already have on hand. Potatoes, carrots, onions — simple things from the root cellar — come together to make something hearty and good. I like to make this on a cold morning with eggs, or in the evening as a side to a roast.

### Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 parsnips, diced
- 2 potatoes, diced
- 1 small onion, diced
- Salt, pepper, and fresh thyme to taste

### Directions

1. Heat oil in a large skillet. Add vegetables and onion.
  2. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender and browned, about 20 minutes.
  3. Season with salt, pepper, and thyme.
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## **7.Slow Cooker Lentil Stew**

There's something restful about letting a meal cook itself. You toss everything into the slow cooker in the morning, and by suppertime, the house smells like comfort. Lentils are humble, but they have a way of feeding many and making you grateful for simple food.

### **Ingredients**

- 1 cup dry lentils, rinsed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 1 can diced tomatoes (14 oz)
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste

### **Directions**

1. Place all ingredients into a slow cooker. Stir well.
2. Cook on low for 6–7 hours or high for 3–4 hours until lentils are tender.
3. Adjust seasoning before serving.

## 8. Maple Custard Cups

This custard feels like the kind of dessert you'd make when money was tight, but you still wanted to put something sweet on the table. Eggs, milk, and a little maple syrup — nothing fancy, yet it feels special in its simplicity. Sometimes that's what winter teaches us: you don't need much, just a little care and warmth to make something lovely.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups milk
- 3 eggs
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup pure maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt
- Ground nutmeg, optional
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### Directions

1. Heat milk gently until warm but not boiling.
2. In a bowl, whisk eggs, maple syrup, vanilla, and salt. Slowly whisk in warm milk.
3. Pour into 6 greased ramekins. Sprinkle with nutmeg.
4. Place ramekins in a baking dish; add hot water halfway up the sides.
5. Bake at 325°F for 40 minutes until set.

## Activities & Traditions

I always think the best traditions are the simple ones, the ones you can do without a lot of extra supplies or stress. Here are a few ideas for weaving rest into your winter days, tailored for little ones, older kids, and the whole family together.

### For Younger Children

- **Create a Rest Corner:** Gather a few pillows, a quilt, and a basket of picture books or Bible storybooks. Let them enjoy a cozy “quiet time” space while you have your own.
- **Winter Afternoon Tea Party:** Boil some water for tea (or warm milk with honey for little ones), and set out simple snacks like toast with jam or apple slices. Light a candle and let it feel special, even if it’s just the two of you.
- **Nature Window Watching:** Pull a chair to the window, give your child a little notebook, and let them draw or “record” what they see — birds, snow, clouds moving across the sky.

### For Teens

- **Quiet Hour Challenge:** Try a one-hour unplugged time in the evening. Encourage journaling, sketching, or reading something encouraging. Talk afterwards about how it felt.
- **Cooking Night:** Invite them to help with one of the chapter’s recipes — like the Rustic Oatmeal Molasses Bread. Kneading dough together can open the door for heart-to-heart conversations.
- **Winter Photography:** Give them the family camera or phone and challenge them to capture “signs of rest” around the home or outdoors. Share the photos together at the end of the week.

## For Families Together

- **Weekly Soup Night:** Pick one night each week in winter to simmer a pot of soup and bake bread. Keep it simple, keep it cozy, and let it be the night everyone expects to slow down together.
- **Candlelight Devotions:** After dinner, turn off the lights, light a candle, and read a short passage of Scripture. Sing a hymn together if you'd like, or just share one thing you're grateful for.
- **Blanket & Story Night:** Spread quilts on the floor, pile on pillows, and read aloud together — whether it's Scripture, a novel, or even one of your family's favorite stories.

## **Closing Reflection:**

As you think about the idea of rest this winter, I want to leave you with a few gentle questions. You don't need to answer them all at once. Maybe pick one and sit with it for a while, or even jot your thoughts down in a notebook over a cup of tea.

1. What does *rest* honestly look like for you right now? Not the Pinterest-perfect version, but the real-life kind you could practice in your own home.
2. Do you find yourself feeling guilty when you slow down? Where do you think that guilt comes from?
3. Which of the Scriptures we read at the beginning speaks most to your soul in this season? Why?
4. What small rhythm or "holy pause" could you add to your week to help you breathe deeper?
5. How can you invite your family into rest with you — not just physically, but in their hearts and minds too?
6. Is there a burden you've been carrying that you need to surrender to the Lord? What would it feel like to lay it down today?

## Chapter 2: Creating Warmth Indoors

### **Scripture Reading**

#### **Psalm 91:1–2 (NLT)**

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.*

#### **Proverbs 24:3–4 (AMP)**

*Through skillful and godly wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established [on a sound and good foundation], and by knowledge its rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.*

#### **Isaiah 32:18 (NLT)**

*My people will live in safety, quietly at home. They will be at rest.*

### **Devotional**

There's something about winter that draws us back inside. The chill in the air, the long evenings, and the hush of the world outside all make home feel more important than ever. Home becomes more than just walls and a roof — it becomes a refuge. It's the place we gather to be comforted, to be restored, and to find joy in the ordinary.

When the wind rattles the windows and the nights stretch long, our homes are the spaces where warmth is not only felt in blankets and stoves, but in the spirit of the people who live within. And yet, sometimes we forget that creating warmth is more than keeping the fire stoked. It's about cultivating a place where love lingers in the corners, where peace rests in the air, and where every heart feels safe.

Psalm 91 tells us that the Lord Himself is our refuge, our shelter, and our safe place. If He is our model, then our homes can be a small reflection of His care. Just as God welcomes us into His presence, weary and burdened, we can open our homes to our families and guests

with that same spirit of rest and belonging. Warmth indoors begins not with blankets or candles, but with hearts that are open, patient, and kind.

I think back to the times when my own home felt chaotic, when I thought I needed the “right” décor or the perfectly clean space before warmth could be found. But the truth is, a home is not warm because it looks perfect — it’s warm because it feels lived in, loved in, and blessed with presence.

A candle glowing in a messy kitchen can bring more peace than a showroom living room that feels untouchable. Proverbs 24 reminds us that a house is built by wisdom, established by understanding, and filled with knowledge. This isn’t about filling it with things; it’s about filling it with meaning. A photograph on the wall, a quilt across the back of the sofa, the aroma of bread baking in the oven — these are the “riches” that make a space precious. None of them require wealth. They require presence. They require us choosing to pour a little of our hearts into the place where we spend our days.

Isaiah 32 paints a promise: *“My people will live in safety, quietly at home. They will be at rest.”* Isn’t that what we all long for? A quietness in our homes that wraps us like a blanket. Rest that doesn’t just come from the absence of noise, but from the presence of peace. Safety that comes from knowing you are loved and cared for. That’s the kind of warmth we can build indoors, even when the winds outside howl.

There are many ways to nurture this warmth practically. It could be as simple as keeping a basket of cozy blankets near the couch, or lighting a candle during supper. It could be a habit of turning on soft music in the evenings, or making a pot of tea when someone comes in chilled. Small gestures remind those we love: *you belong here, you are welcome here, you are safe here.*

But there is also a deeper warmth we are called to cultivate. It's the warmth of gentle words instead of sharp ones, of laughter instead of criticism, of patience instead of hurry. These things cost us nothing but can change the entire atmosphere of a home. When we choose kindness, we are laying down a quilt over the hearts of our family. When we choose forgiveness, we are stoking the fire of love that keeps bitterness from settling in.

Sometimes we think our homes must be large or beautiful to be a refuge. But the truth is, a one-room cabin with love will always feel warmer than a grand house filled with coldness. Creating warmth indoors is about the spirit you bring into the space. It's about looking at your family with eyes of grace, making room for joy even in the ordinary, and remembering that home is the first place where love is learned.

This winter, as the days stretch on, let us remember that warmth is something we can give. With every meal placed on the table, every lamp lit in the evening, every word spoken with love, we are saying: *this is your refuge, this is your safe place*. Our homes may not always look the way we dream, but they can always carry the presence of God's peace.

So, light the fire. Pull the quilt a little tighter. Open your Bible and let His Word shape the atmosphere of your space. Because the truest warmth is not in what we own, but in who we welcome in, and in the presence of the Lord who makes our homes a sanctuary.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. When you think of "warmth" in your home, what comes to mind first — physical comfort, emotional safety, or spiritual peace?
2. Do you sometimes feel pressured to make your home look perfect instead of simply making it feel welcoming? How could you release that pressure this winter?

3. Which of the Scriptures from this chapter (Psalm 91, Proverbs 24, Isaiah 32) speaks most to your longing for a warm and safe home?
4. What is one small, practical thing you can do this week to bring a little extra warmth into your home — a blanket basket, a candle, a meal, or even softer words?
5. How can you model God's sheltering love to your family when they are weary or struggling?
6. Think back to your childhood — what made a home feel cozy and safe for you? How can you carry that same spirit into your home today?
7. If someone walked into your home right now, what feeling would they sense most? What would you like them to sense instead?

## **Creating Warmth Indoors**

The storm had passed in the night, leaving the prairie blanketed in white. The world outside looked almost untouched, as though no human hand had ever laid claim to it. The fence posts stood like sentinels half-buried in snow, and the bare branches of the cottonwoods glittered with ice when the pale morning sun struck them. The silence was so complete that even the call of a lone crow startled the air.

Inside the small farmhouse, though, the silence gave way to the steady crackle of firewood and the low hum of life. The family had woken to a house chilled from the storm, the stove's embers nearly gone, but Father had risen early, coaxing the fire back into a blaze. Already, heat was spreading again, creeping into the corners and sending wisps of frost retreating from the windowpanes.

Mother was at the table, wrapping her hands around a cup of chicory coffee, her shoulders wrapped in a shawl. The children stirred slowly from their beds in the loft, rubbing sleep from their eyes as they clambered down the ladder one by one. Their hair stuck out in tufts, their cheeks flushed pink from the cold. It was always hardest to leave the warmth of the quilts in January, but the scent of breakfast was coaxing them down.

On the stove, an iron skillet sizzled with corn cakes, their edges browning crisp while the middle stayed soft. A small crock of apple butter sat ready on the table, a treasure from the cellar, made months ago but saved for mornings like these. The smell filled the house, sweet and spicy, and even before the children reached the table, they smiled at the thought of spreading it across the steaming cakes.

Meals in winter carried a kind of weight they didn't in summer. In summer, food was rushed — something snatched quickly before heading back out to the fields. But in winter, when the days stretched long and slow, meals became an anchor in the rhythm of home. They gathered not just for nourishment, but for the warmth of sitting shoulder to shoulder, talking softly, laughing in the lamplight, and taking comfort in the ordinary.

After breakfast, Father pulled on his heavy coat and stepped outside to tend the animals. His boots sank deep into the snow with each step, and his breath came in plumes of white. The cow lowed from the barn, waiting for hay, and the hens stirred restlessly. The chores were slower in winter, but no less steady. As Father worked, his eyes wandered often to the horizon, scanning the endless white fields. There was beauty in it, yes, but also danger — storms could blow in with little warning, and the cold could bite hard. Yet he knew the safety of his family inside gave him strength for the work.

Inside, Mother cleared the table and began the morning's tasks. The younger children settled on the rug with their rag dolls, while the older ones brought slates to the table. Lessons in winter were different — less formal, more woven into the fabric of the day. A little arithmetic, some reading from the Bible or a well-worn primer, and then the practical lessons: sewing, mending, baking. "Hands should never be idle," Mother often said, but she taught them gently, showing them that work done with love warmed more than the body; it warmed the soul.

That afternoon, as the wind picked up again, Mother called the children to help lay quilts along the window ledges. The farmhouse was drafty, and when storms blew strong, every scrap of warmth mattered. The children pressed fabric into the cracks, giggling as they worked together. Soon the house grew cozier, the howling wind muffled, the glow of the stove making the little room shine like a lantern in the vast whiteness outside.

Evenings were the truest test of warmth. Darkness fell early, sometimes before they felt the day had truly begun. But that was when home became most precious. Mother lit the lamp, turning the wick just enough for a steady glow, and the room seemed to shrink in the best way — pulling everyone closer, making the small circle of light feel like the whole world.

Father told stories while he mended harnesses or carved small wooden toys by the fire. His deep voice wove through the room, steady and strong.

The children leaned in close, eyes wide, as he told tales of the winters he'd weathered as a boy, of sleigh rides and blizzards, of survival and joy. The younger ones clutched their dolls, the older ones stitched small projects, and every heart was knit together in those hours.

Sometimes, when the storm outside grew fierce, they sang hymns. Their voices rose above the wind, soft but sure, filling the space with harmony. It didn't matter if the notes wavered; what mattered was the warmth that spread as their hearts lifted in unison. The fire roared in the stove, the lamp flickered, and the walls seemed to hold the sound as if to remember it.

The warmth of those evenings wasn't in the firewood alone. It was in the patience of a mother teaching her daughter to mend a seam. It was in the laughter of brothers playing a quiet game of checkers on the floor. It was in the way Father placed his hand gently on Mother's shoulder as he passed behind her chair. The warmth was in love lived out in small ways, over and over again.

Years later, when the children were grown, they remembered those winter nights more than the hardships. They remembered how the walls might have been thin and the storms strong, but the warmth inside was stronger still. They remembered the safety of gathering around the fire, the sweetness of simple food, the joy of stories and song. They remembered what it felt like to belong in that circle of light, to know that no matter how harsh the world outside became, home was always a refuge.

Warmth, they had learned, was not something you could measure with a thermometer. It was measured in love, in faith, in family. And that lesson carried them wherever they went.

## Comfort Foods

### 1. Cinnamon Sugar Pull-Apart Loaf

There's something about pulling warm pieces of bread apart with your hands that feels like childhood. This loaf bakes up golden and sweet, and when you set it in the center of the table, it disappears faster than you expect. It's wonderful on a Saturday morning or as an evening treat with cocoa.

#### Ingredients

- 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup sugar
- 2  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp yeast (1 packet)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup warm milk
- 2 Tbsp butter, melted
- 1 egg

#### For filling:

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup butter, melted

#### Directions

1. In a mixing bowl, combine flour, sugar, yeast, and salt. Add milk, butter, and egg; stir until dough forms.
2. Knead until smooth, 6–8 minutes. Place in greased bowl, cover, and rise until doubled, about 1 hour.
3. Roll dough into a large rectangle. Brush with melted butter, sprinkle evenly with cinnamon sugar.
4. Cut into strips, stack them, then slice into squares. Layer squares in a greased loaf pan.
5. Cover and let rise 30 minutes. Bake at 350°F for 30–35 minutes until golden.

**Cook's Note:** This loaf is meant to be messy and fun. Everyone reaching in together, laughing as sugar sprinkles the table — that's part of the warmth.

## 2. Tomato Soup

This is the kind of tomato soup you make not because it's fancy, but because it's good and it works. It's creamy, rich, and perfect for dipping a sandwich into.

### Ingredients

- 2 Tbsp flour
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- ⅛ tsp baking soda
- 2 cups milk
- 1 can (15 oz) tomato sauce
- ½ tsp dried basil
- ¼ tsp paprika
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

### Directions

1. In a medium saucepan, whisk flour, sugar, and baking soda with a splash of milk until smooth.
2. Gradually add the rest of the milk, whisking constantly over medium heat.
3. Stir in tomato sauce, basil, paprika, and garlic powder.
4. Simmer 10–12 minutes, stirring often, until thickened. Season with salt and pepper.

**Cook's Note:** You don't need a long list of ingredients to make comfort food. This soup proves it — simple, creamy, and the definition of cozy.

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## 3. Classic Cast-Iron Grilled Cheese Sandwiches

There's nothing like a grilled cheese cooked in a heavy skillet. The outside crisps up golden while the inside melts into gooey perfection. Pair it with a bowl of tomato soup and you've got one of the best winter suppers.

### Ingredients

- 8 slices bread (white, wheat, or sourdough)
- 6 Tbsp butter, softened
- 8 slices cheddar cheese (or mix of your favorite cheeses)

### Directions

1. Spread butter on one side of each slice of bread.
2. Heat a cast-iron skillet over medium-low. Place bread butter-side down, top with cheese, then another slice of bread.
3. Cook 3–4 minutes per side, pressing gently with a spatula, until golden and cheese is melted.

**Cook's Note:** Sometimes the simplest meals are the most comforting. Nothing fancy, just bread, cheese, and love — but it feels like home.

## 4. Stuffed Bell Peppers with Rice & Tomato

Colorful, filling, and wholesome, stuffed peppers are the kind of meal that makes you feel cared for. Each pepper is its own little serving, baked until tender and bubbling.

### Ingredients

- 4 large bell peppers (any color), tops removed, seeds out
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (15 oz) diced tomatoes
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella or cheddar
- Salt and black pepper, to taste

### Directions

1. Boil peppers in salted water for 5 minutes; drain.
2. In a skillet, cook ground beef and onion until browned. Add garlic, tomatoes, rice, and seasoning. Cook 5 minutes.
3. Spoon filling into peppers, place in a baking dish. Top with cheese.
4. Cover with foil and bake at 375°F for 25 minutes. Uncover and bake 10 minutes more until cheese is bubbly.

**Cook's Note:** These are as pretty as they are filling. You'll find they make the table feel special without a lot of fuss.

## 5. Homemade Egg Noodles with Butter & Herbs

Egg noodles are old-fashioned comfort at its best. Rolled, cut, and boiled fresh, they remind you that simple food is often the most satisfying.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 eggs
- 2 Tbsp milk
- 2 Tbsp butter, melted
- 2 Tbsp chopped parsley or chives

### Directions

1. In a bowl, combine flour and salt. Make a well in the center, add eggs and milk, mix into a stiff dough.
2. Knead 5 minutes; cover and rest 30 minutes.
3. Roll thin on a floured surface; cut into strips.
4. Boil in salted water 3–4 minutes until tender. Drain.
5. Toss with butter and herbs before serving.

**Cook's Note:** When you've rolled out your own noodles, supper feels special — even if all you do is toss them in butter.

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## 6. Old-Fashioned Rice Pudding with Cinnamon

Rice pudding is the dessert you make when you don't think you have anything for dessert. Just a few pantry staples turn into creamy comfort baked in the oven.

### Ingredients

- 3 cups cooked rice
- 2 cups milk
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup raisins (optional)

### Directions

1. Whisk milk, eggs, sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon. Stir in rice (and raisins if using).
2. Pour into a greased baking dish.
3. Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes, stirring halfway through.
4. Serve warm or chilled.

**Cook's Note:** This is a "grandmother" kind of dessert — simple, filling, and quietly sweet.

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## 7.Chocolate Molasses Gingerbread Cake

This cake smells like winter itself while it bakes — spicy, rich, and dark. It's not overly sweet, but just enough to make it feel like a treat with a little whipped cream.

### Ingredients

- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup molasses
- 2 eggs
- 1 ½ cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ginger
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- 1 cup hot water

### Directions

1. Cream butter and sugar; beat in molasses and eggs.
2. In another bowl, combine flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, and cocoa.
3. Add dry mixture to wet, alternating with hot water.
4. Pour into a greased 9x9 pan and bake at 350°F for 35–40 minutes.

**Cook's Note:** Gingerbread always feels like a storybook recipe. The scent lingers in the house long after the cake is gone.

## 8. Savory Cheddar Cheese Scones

These scones are the savory counterpart to all the sweet baking of winter. Flaky, buttery, and sharp with cheddar, they're wonderful with soup or as a snack on their own.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp cayenne (optional)
- ½ cup cold butter, cubed
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ¾ cup milk

### Directions

1. Whisk flour, baking powder, salt, and cayenne. Cut in butter until crumbly.
2. Stir in cheese. Add milk and mix until dough comes together.
3. Pat into a circle, cut into wedges.
4. Bake at 400°F for 15–18 minutes until golden.

**Cook's Note:** These taste like comfort wrapped up in bread. Split one open while warm and let the steam carry the cheese scent through the kitchen.

## Activities & Traditions

### Indoors

Creating warmth inside your home isn't only about soup simmering on the stove or quilts draped over the couch — though those certainly help. It's also about the moments you build together, the little rituals that become memory-makers. Here are a few ways to bring that sense of cozy warmth into your days this winter.

### For Younger Children

- **Blanket Fort Evenings:** Gather quilts and let the little ones build a "tent" in the living room. Add a lantern or flashlight, a pile of books, and maybe a plate of snacks. It turns an ordinary night into an adventure.
- **Handmade Candle Holders:** Give them jars, tissue paper, and glue to make simple candle holders. Place battery candles inside, and let them glow on the table at supper. Kids love seeing their handiwork light the room.
- **Indoor Picnic Night:** Spread a quilt on the floor, serve sandwiches and fruit, and pretend it's a picnic — even if the wind is howling outside.

### For Teens

- **Soup & Bread Night (with them cooking):** Hand over one of the recipes — maybe Tomato Soup or Cinnamon Sugar Pull-Apart Loaf — and let them take charge. Teens often feel proud when they contribute, and food brings everyone together.
- **Board Game Challenge:** Dust off an old board game or card deck, and make it a weekly family event. Offer a silly "prize" like skipping a chore or choosing the next meal.
- **Cozy Music Playlist:** Encourage them to create a "winter warmth" playlist. Play it during supper or evenings together — it gives them ownership in the atmosphere of the home.

## For Families Together

- **Candlelight Suppers:** Pick one night a week to eat dinner by candlelight. Turn off the overhead lights, light a few candles (or lanterns), and let the slower pace settle in. It changes the entire feel of the meal.
- **Fireside Reading Hour:** Choose a book to read aloud together in the evenings. Everyone gathers — blankets, cocoa, and all — and listens. It could be Scripture, a classic novel, or even family stories passed down.
- **Winter Gratitude Jar:** Keep a jar in the kitchen with slips of paper. Every evening, invite each family member to jot down one thing they're grateful for. At the end of winter, sit down and read them aloud together.
- **Warm Welcome Tradition:** Whenever someone comes in from the cold, whether it's from work, chores, or errands, offer them something warm — a cup of tea, cocoa, or even just a blanket waiting on the couch. Small gestures build lasting memories.

## Closing Reflection

As you think about warmth this winter, remember that it is about more than a fire in the stove or a quilt on the bed. Warmth begins with the spirit of the home — the way love is spoken, the way forgiveness is offered, the way peace is nurtured in little, daily ways. You don't need a picture-perfect house to create a refuge; you only need a willing heart and the grace of God filling your space.

Every candle you light, every gentle word you speak, every simple meal you serve with love — it all builds warmth that will linger in your family's memory long after the snow has melted.

1. How can I invite the Lord's peace to settle more deeply in my home this winter?
2. What small habit or rhythm could I begin that would help my family feel more sheltered and safe indoors?
3. Are there words or actions that might be "chilling" the warmth of our home? How can I replace them with kindness?
4. What traditions of warmth do I want my children to carry with them into their own homes someday?
5. If I could describe the atmosphere of my home in one word, what would it be today? What would I like it to be?

## Chapter 3: Winter Comfort Foods

### Scripture Reading

#### **Matthew 6:11 (NLT)**

*Give us today the food we need.*

#### **John 6:35 (AMP)**

*Jesus replied to them, "I am the Bread of Life; the one who comes to Me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in Me [as Savior] will never be thirsty [for that one will be sustained spiritually]."*

#### **Psalm 107:9 (NLT)**

*For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.*

### Devotional:

There's something about winter that makes food feel different. Maybe it's the cold air that sharpens the appetite, or maybe it's the way the darkness falls so early that supper becomes the brightest part of the day. Whatever it is, winter meals carry a certain weight — not just in filling the stomach, but in warming the spirit.

In the warmer months, meals can feel rushed and scattered. Sandwiches eaten quickly before heading outdoors, salads thrown together, light fare that keeps everyone moving. But in the deep of winter, when the nights are long and the house becomes the center of life, food takes on a deeper role. It is not simply fuel — it becomes comfort.

Comfort food is not about extravagance. In fact, some of the most comforting meals come from humble ingredients: a pot of beans simmering all day, bread rising slowly on the counter, potatoes baked until their insides are soft and steaming. These meals don't dazzle with sophistication, but they steady us. They remind us that God's provision is often simple and enough.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included the words, "Give us today the food we need." Such a simple request, yet so profound. He didn't tell them to ask for banquets or delicacies, but for daily bread. Winter comfort foods remind us of that prayer — they may not be extravagant, but they are daily gifts of nourishment that steady our hearts and bodies.

And yet, there's another layer to comfort food. It isn't only about what we eat; it's about who we eat with. A bowl of soup is good, but a bowl of soup eaten shoulder to shoulder with someone you love is better. Fresh bread is delicious, but fresh bread torn apart at a table full of laughter is unforgettable. The warmth of food is amplified by the warmth of community.

John 6:35 tells us that Jesus is the Bread of Life. He satisfies hunger and thirst at the deepest level. That verse reminds me that no matter how many cozy meals I prepare, the truest comfort comes not from the pot on the stove but from the presence of Christ in our home. Food fills the body, but He fills the soul. Winter meals can serve as a picture of that truth — each bite of something nourishing can remind us of His faithfulness to provide.

I've found that some of the most comforting meals are also the simplest to make. A pot of macaroni and cheese on a night when the wind won't stop blowing. A pan of roasted root vegetables when the days feel endless and gray. A casserole bubbling in the oven, sending its scent into every corner of the house. These meals may not impress a magazine, but they remind your family that they are seen, cared for, and loved.

Psalm 107:9 says, "*For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.*" Isn't that the heart of comfort food? To take the hunger we feel and to satisfy it with something that tastes of home, love, and care. I think that's why certain recipes get passed down through generations. They aren't just food — they are stories, they are love notes written in flour and butter and steam.

This winter, as you gather your family around the table, don't underestimate the power of these small offerings. A pot of soup can become a memory. A loaf of bread can become a story told years later. A simple dessert can become a tradition that carries warmth into the future. What matters most is not the perfection of the meal, but the love with which it is prepared and shared.

So, as the snow falls and the winds howl, don't be afraid to lean into the comfort of food. Let your kitchen be a sanctuary, your table an altar of gratitude, and your meals a reminder of God's goodness. Every time you stir the pot, knead the dough, or pass a plate, you are echoing His provision: *He fills the hungry with good things.*

## Reflection Questions

1. When you think of "comfort food," what recipe comes to mind first — and why do you think it feels so comforting to you?
2. How does Matthew 6:11 ("Give us today the food we need") change the way you think about the simple meals God provides?
3. Do you sometimes feel pressure to make meals impressive instead of simply nourishing? How can you release that pressure this season?
4. Who in your life has modeled the kind of simple, nourishing cooking that made you feel cared for? What can you carry forward from their example?
5. How might you invite Jesus, the Bread of Life, into the ordinary rhythms of your family meals this winter?
6. What is one small food tradition you could begin in your home that might become a source of comfort in the years to come?

## Winter Comfort Foods

The cold had set in deep on the prairie. Snow lay piled against the fence rails, the barn doors, the very edges of the little farmhouse. For weeks, the land had been locked in frost, the wind carrying with it a sharpness that cut across cheeks and made breath sting in the lungs. The days were short, and the nights long, the kind of winter that tested a body's endurance and a family's spirit.

Inside the farmhouse, though, the kitchen was alive. The wood stove, blackened by years of use, glowed with steady heat. Its surface hissed and popped as kettles bubbled and skillets sizzled. Mother had been at her work since the first gray light of morning, apron tied snug, cheeks flushed from the warmth of the stove. In winter, the kitchen was not only the heart of the home — it was its soul.

On this particular morning, she was stirring a pot of beans that had been soaking overnight. Into the simmering pot went onions, a scrap of salt pork, and a handful of herbs dried from summer's garden. The aroma rose slowly, filling the air with something savory and comforting, a promise that by day's end, they would eat heartily.

The children drifted in and out of the kitchen, drawn by the smells. Little Anna carried in logs for the stove, dropping them clumsily into the wood box, her mittens still dusted with snow. She lingered near the pot, peeking in, her eyes wide with anticipation. Mother smiled and shooed her out to the sitting room with a piece of bread spread with butter, still warm from yesterday's baking.

Father came in from the barn, stamping snow from his boots. His face was red from the wind, his coat heavy with frost. He shed his outer layers near the door and sank into a chair, weary but grateful for the warmth. Mother set a mug of coffee in front of him, the steam rising into his weathered hands. He wrapped his fingers around it, sighing as the heat seeped into his bones.

By midday, the kitchen was bustling. The older children were tasked with slicing potatoes thin for a pan of scalloped potatoes, layering them carefully with onions, butter, and milk. The youngest helped shell dried beans from a basket kept near the hearth, her small fingers fumbling but eager. Flour dusted the air as Mother kneaded dough for bread, the rhythmic push and pull of her hands against the dough almost like a prayer.

There was no extravagance in these meals, no luxury. But there was abundance, even in simplicity. Every dish carried the memory of work — the beans dried and stored after harvest, the potatoes dug from the cellar, the flour ground and saved. In the hardest months of the year, the very act of cooking became an act of hope: proof that what they had worked for would carry them through.

As the afternoon darkened into early evening, the lamps were lit. Shadows danced along the walls as the kitchen grew warmer, busier, alive with clatter and hum. The table was laid with simple care — mismatched plates, a crock of butter, a jar of pickles from last summer's canning, a cloth that had seen many winters. The meal was not grand, but it was hearty, filling every inch of the table with nourishment.

When the family gathered, the room seemed to glow. Steam rose from bowls of beans, from the pan of scalloped potatoes, from the bread torn and passed from hand to hand. Father bowed his head and prayed a prayer of gratitude — not for wealth, not for abundance beyond measure, but for enough. For warmth, for food, for family gathered safe around the table.

The children ate heartily, their laughter bubbling up as freely as the steam from the plates. Their cheeks flushed in the glow of the fire, their bellies warmed by the food, their hearts knit together by the simple joy of being safe, being fed, being home.

After supper, the table was cleared, the dishes stacked. Mother tucked away leftovers, careful with each scrap, knowing how precious food was in winter. Father leaned back in his chair, pipe in hand, telling a story of winters past — how his own mother had kept the pot of beans simmering on the hearth, how a heel of bread and a bit of cheese had often been enough to satisfy. The children listened, wide-eyed, seeing in his story the same comfort they felt in their own home now.

Later, when the lamps were turned down and the fire banked low, the memory of the meal lingered. The smells of bread and beans, the sound of laughter at the table, the warmth of gathering close in the midst of cold. These were not just meals; they were the weaving of memory, the anchoring of souls to the truth that home was a refuge, and God's provision was steady and sure.

Years would pass. The children would grow and scatter. But in their minds, the memory of those winter comfort foods — the beans, the bread, the potatoes, the soups — would remain. They would remember how the food filled them, yes, but more than that, how it filled their hearts with safety and belonging. And wherever they went, they would know that comfort food was never just about food. It was about the love that served it, the prayers that blessed it, and the God who gave it.

## Comfort Foods

### 1. Buttermilk Pancakes with Warm Maple Syrup

There's something sacred about pancakes on a winter morning. The skillet hisses, the batter bubbles, and before you know it the kitchen is filled with the smell of golden cakes ready to stack high. Pouring warm maple syrup over the top feels like grace — simple and sweet.

#### Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 2 eggs
- 4 Tbsp melted butter

#### Directions

1. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a bowl.
2. In another bowl, whisk buttermilk, eggs, and melted butter.
3. Combine wet and dry ingredients gently — a few lumps are fine.
4. Heat a skillet over medium heat. Pour ¼ cup batter for each pancake.
5. Cook until bubbles form, flip, and cook until golden.
6. Serve stacked with butter and warm maple syrup.

**Cook's Note:** Pancakes have a way of slowing mornings down. No one rushes a plate of pancakes — they linger, and that's the gift.

## 2. Chicken Pot Pie with Flaky Crust

This is the kind of meal that makes you feel hugged from the inside. The creamy filling, the golden crust — it's winter food at its finest.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup peas
- 1 cup potatoes, diced and boiled until tender
- 1 small onion, diced
- 4 Tbsp butter
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup milk
- Salt, pepper, and thyme to taste
- 1 double pie crust (homemade or store-bought)

### Directions

1. In a skillet, melt butter. Add onion and carrots; cook 5 minutes.
2. Stir in flour, whisking until smooth. Slowly add broth and milk, stirring until thickened.
3. Add chicken, peas, and potatoes. Season with salt, pepper, and thyme.
4. Pour filling into a pie dish. Cover with crust, crimp edges, and cut slits in top.
5. Bake at 400°F for 30–35 minutes until golden.

**Cook's Note:** Pot pie is proof that leftovers can become something extraordinary. It's less about perfection, more about comfort.

### 3. Beef & Barley Soup

If soup could wear a wool sweater, it would be this one. Hearty, earthy, and filling, it's the kind of soup that warms you all the way through.

#### Ingredients

- 1 lb beef stew meat, cubed
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 8 cups beef broth
- ½ cup pearl barley
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper to taste

#### Directions

1. Heat oil in a large pot. Brown beef on all sides, then remove.
2. Add onion, carrots, and celery; cook 5 minutes. Add garlic.
3. Return beef to pot with broth, barley, bay leaf, salt, and pepper.
4. Simmer, covered, 1½–2 hours until beef is tender and barley is soft.

**Cook's Note:** This is the soup you ladle into deep bowls on the kind of night you can hear the wind outside. It fills you twice — once with food, once with peace.

#### **4. Homemade Applesauce (Slow-Cooked)**

Winter apples may not be pretty, but they make the best applesauce. Cooked low and slow with cinnamon, it turns into something golden and comforting.

#### **Ingredients**

- 6 large apples, peeled and sliced
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup sugar (more or less to taste)
- 1 tsp cinnamon

#### **Directions**

1. Place apples, water, sugar, and cinnamon in a pot.
2. Cover and simmer over low heat for 25–30 minutes until soft.
3. Mash with a fork for chunky sauce or blend for smooth.

**Cook's Note:** Spoon this warm over biscuits, pancakes, or just into a bowl. It tastes like winter afternoons when the house smells sweet and safe.

## 5. Cabbage Rolls in Tomato Sauce

This is a dish that feels old-fashioned in the best way. Tender cabbage leaves wrapped around rice and meat, simmered in tomato sauce until they melt in your mouth.

### Ingredients

- 1 head cabbage
- 1 lb ground beef or pork
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 1 small onion, minced
- 1 egg
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- 1 tsp sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Directions

1. Boil cabbage leaves 2–3 minutes until soft; drain.
2. Mix beef, rice, onion, egg, salt, and pepper.
3. Place spoonful of mixture in each leaf, roll up tightly.
4. Arrange in a baking dish. Pour tomato sauce mixed with sugar over top.
5. Cover and bake at 350°F for 1 hour.

**Cook's Note:** These rolls take a little time, but they taste like heritage — the kind of recipe passed down in kitchens for generations.

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## 6. Brown Butter Mashed Potatoes

Mashed potatoes are already comforting, but when you add brown butter, they become something rich and unforgettable.

### Ingredients

- 3 lbs potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 stick (½ cup) butter
- ½ cup milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Directions

1. Boil potatoes until tender; drain.
2. In a small pan, melt butter and cook until golden brown and nutty.
3. Mash potatoes with milk. Stir in brown butter, salt, and pepper.

**Cook's Note:** Brown butter is magic — it turns an everyday dish into something with depth and warmth, like adding a story to a simple meal.

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## 7.Apple Cider Donuts

If comfort had a scent, it would be apple cider donuts frying in hot oil. Rolled in cinnamon sugar, they taste like a winter fair brought into your own kitchen.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup apple cider
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 Tbsp butter, melted
- 1 egg
- ½ cup buttermilk

### Directions

1. Simmer cider until reduced to ½ cup; cool.
2. Mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and nutmeg.
3. In another bowl, whisk sugar, butter, egg, cider, and buttermilk. Combine with dry.
4. Roll out and cut donuts. Fry in hot oil until golden. Toss in cinnamon sugar.

**Cook's Note:** These never last long. Eat them warm, when the sugar still sparkles and the kitchen smells like joy.

## 8.Cranberry Orange Quick Bread

This bread is bright and cheerful, a burst of color and flavor in the middle of winter's gray. Sweet, tangy, and moist — perfect with tea.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- ¾ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 1 Tbsp orange zest
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries

### Directions

1. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
2. Stir in orange juice, butter, egg, and zest. Fold in cranberries.
3. Pour into greased loaf pan. Bake at 350°F for 50–55 minutes.

**Cook's Note:** Every slice feels like sunshine on a cloudy day. It's a little tart, a little sweet, and just right for winter tea time.

## Activities & Traditions

Winter foods aren't just about filling hungry stomachs — they become rituals that shape memories. The smell of bread baking, the laughter over a stack of pancakes, the comfort of a bowl of soup at the end of a long day...these moments linger long after the plates are cleared. Here are some ways to turn simple meals into family traditions that bring warmth to the heart as well as the body.

### For Younger Children

- **Little Kitchen Helpers:** Let little ones mash the potatoes, stir applesauce, or sprinkle sugar on donuts. Their hands might be clumsy, but their delight is contagious.
- **Food Storytime:** Pair cooking with a story. While applesauce simmers or bread bakes, gather the children and read a favorite book. They'll forever connect the smell of those foods with the coziness of your voice.
- **Shape Pancakes Together:** Pour pancake batter into hearts, stars, or initials — giggles always come when food is "special."

### For Teens

- **Pass Down a Recipe Night:** Choose one recipe — maybe cabbage rolls or pot pie — and let a teen be in charge. Teach them how, step by step, and then sit together at the table and praise their efforts.
- **Donut Frying Evening:** Teens love a little adventure in the kitchen. Invite them to help with frying donuts (with supervision). Rolling them in cinnamon sugar feels fun and just a bit grown-up.
- **Create a Family Recipe Book:** Encourage them to write down family favorites — both from this chapter and their own ideas. Someday they'll look back and remember these winters.

## For Families Together

- **Sunday Pancake Tradition:** Choose one morning a week where pancakes are always on the table. No rushing, no fuss — just everyone gathered with syrup and smiles.
- **Soup & Story Nights:** Once a week, make a big pot of soup (like beef & barley) and sit down together. After supper, linger with a story — Scripture, a read-aloud, or even family history shared by grandparents.
- **Winter Baking Afternoon:** Pick a snowy afternoon to bake cranberry bread or donuts together. Turn on music, let the kitchen get messy, and enjoy the process more than the result.
- **Comfort Food Blessing Jar:** Each time you make one of these recipes, write it down with the date and a short memory — who was there, what was said, maybe even a funny spill or a sweet moment. By spring, you'll have a jar full of blessings to read aloud.

## **Closing Reflection**

Food is never just food. In the quiet of winter, a steaming bowl, a warm loaf, or a simple sweet can do far more than nourish the body — it comforts the soul. Comfort foods remind us that God provides not only for our needs, but often with abundance that delights us: the scent of cinnamon, the crisp bite of a donut, the creamy richness of a pot pie.

Each recipe we stir, knead, or bake becomes part of a story. Children will remember the laughter over pancakes on a snowy morning, the warmth of soup on stormy nights, the joy of eating donuts while the sugar still clings to their fingertips. Years from now, they may not remember the exact details of winter days, but they will remember the flavors of home — and the love that was served alongside them.

Let every meal you make this season be more than a dish. Let it be an offering of warmth, a prayer of gratitude, and a reminder that the One who calls Himself the Bread of Life still fills the hungry with good things.

## **Closing Reflection Questions**

1. What meal or food instantly makes me feel comforted, and why do I think it has that effect?
2. How does cooking or baking with my family shift the atmosphere of my home?
3. Which recipe from this chapter could I turn into a weekly or monthly tradition for our family?
4. When I pray "*Give us today the food we need*", how can I remember both physical meals and the spiritual nourishment only Christ provides?
5. What story do I hope my children or loved ones will tell one day about the comfort foods of our home?

## Chapter 4: Family Nights In

### Scripture Reading

#### ***Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NLT)***

*Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.*

#### ***Joshua 24:15 (AMP)***

*But if it is unacceptable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

#### ***Hebrews 10:24–25 (NLT)***

*Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together... but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*

### Devotional:

Winter has a way of drawing families inward. The days are shorter, the air is colder, and before long, the house itself becomes the heart of all activity. In a world that often pulls us in a hundred different directions, there is something profoundly sacred about the simple choice to spend an evening at home together.

When I think back on my own childhood winters, what I remember most are not grand events or elaborate entertainments, but the quiet evenings spent with family. The fire crackling, a board game on the table, a story read aloud, mugs of cocoa steaming in our hands — these are the nights that settled deepest into my memory. They told me, without words, “You belong here. You are safe. You are loved.”

Scripture reminds us again and again of the importance of togetherness. Ecclesiastes tells us that two are better than one, that companionship strengthens and protects us. Joshua reminds us of the commitment of the household — *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

And Hebrews exhorts us not to neglect gathering, not only in the church but also in the daily rhythm of our lives. In a very real way, every time a family chooses to gather in, they are choosing to live out these truths.

Family nights in don't need to be complicated. In fact, the simpler they are, the more meaningful they often become. A simple supper of soup and bread shared together, followed by laughter around a card game, can speak more to the soul than a night of expensive outings. A few candles lit, a story read aloud, and the hush of snow against the windows can create a memory that outlasts any screen or entertainment.

I think part of the beauty of family nights in is that they give us a chance to be fully present with one another. Phones put aside, schedules slowed, the constant hum of busyness quieted — suddenly there is space to notice one another's hearts. To hear the funny stories, the questions, the quiet worries that otherwise might go unspoken. These nights become places of both laughter and tenderness, where relationships deepen in the safety of the home.

There is also a sense of witness in these nights. Children learn by watching. When we make space for family time, they see that relationships matter more than productivity. When we laugh around the table, they learn that joy is worth making time for. When we read Scripture or pray together in the lamplight, they see that faith is not only for Sundays but woven into the fabric of daily life.

Of course, not every evening will feel picture-perfect. Some nights may be filled with squabbles, spilled cocoa, or a board game gone sour. But even those nights matter, because they teach perseverance, forgiveness, and the reality that family is not about perfection but about showing up for one another again and again.

When Joshua declared, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,*" he was not speaking about a single moment but about an ongoing commitment. In the same way, family nights in are not about one magical evening but about building a rhythm, a pattern of gathering that slowly shapes a household into a place of belonging, faith, and love.

This winter, I encourage you to look for ways to carve out these nights. They don't need to be elaborate. They don't need to impress anyone. They simply need to be consistent and heartfelt. Whether it's a game night, a story night, a candlelit supper, or even just a half-hour of sitting together with cocoa, each one is a thread woven into the tapestry of your family's story.

And someday, when the children are grown and the house is quieter, it may be these very nights they remember most. Not the flashy events, not the rushing, but the simple, warm evenings when home was a refuge and family was together. That's the legacy worth leaving.

Here are the **Reflection Questions for Chapter 4: Family Nights In**, designed to help the reader pause, think, and apply the devotional to their own family rhythms.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. When I look back on my own childhood, what simple "family nights" or gatherings do I remember most? What made them special?
2. How can I create space in our current season of life for unhurried time together at home?
3. What small distractions (phones, TV, endless tasks) do I need to set aside in order to be more fully present with my family?

4. How might I weave Scripture, prayer, or faith conversations naturally into our family nights without forcing them?
  
5. Joshua declared, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" What would it look like for my household to echo that declaration in practical, everyday ways this winter?
  
6. What is one realistic step I can take this week to begin (or restore) a rhythm of family nights in?

## **Family Nights In**

The prairie had been hushed all day under a heavy blanket of snow. By late afternoon, the sky had turned a muted shade of gray, the kind that pressed low and promised the cold would deepen overnight. The wind had quieted at last, leaving the world strangely still, as if the land itself were holding its breath.

Inside the little farmhouse, lamps flickered to life one by one, chasing away the early darkness. The fire in the stove glowed steady, crackling softly, while the kettle hissed with the slow, comforting rhythm of steam rising. The day's work was done — the animals fed, the wood stacked high by the door, the dishes from supper washed and drying on the counter. Now came the best part of winter days on the prairie: the evenings when the family drew in close, sheltered from the cold, gathered together around the warmth of home.

The children bustled about the sitting room, their voices bubbling with excitement. Emma, the oldest, spread a quilt on the rug near the fire, carefully smoothing it out to make a "nest" for her younger brothers and sisters. Little Thomas clutched a deck of well-worn cards, eager to play a game of "Old Maid." Mary had a book in her lap, its edges frayed from countless readings, hoping for another chapter aloud before bedtime. Even baby Ruth, too small to join in the games, cooed happily from her mother's lap, her cheeks flushed pink in the lamplight.

Father leaned back in his wooden chair, pipe set aside, his eyes soft as he watched the children prepare. Mother poured cocoa into mismatched mugs — cocoa made from just a little sugar and precious spoonfuls of cocoa powder whisked into warm milk. She set a plate of ginger biscuits on the table, their spicy scent filling the room.

When the mugs were passed around and everyone had settled in, the games began. Laughter rose quickly, filling the little room with warmth louder than the crackle of the fire.

Thomas crowed with delight when he tricked his sister into drawing the “Old Maid” card, while Emma rolled her eyes but couldn’t help but laugh. Mary tried to read, but her giggles made her lose her place. Even Father chuckled, his deep voice rumbling like a hymn in the background.

As the game ended, Mother reached for the book in Mary’s lap. It was a well-loved volume of stories, the kind passed down from one generation to another. She opened to the bookmarked page and began to read, her voice soft and steady, carrying everyone away into another world even as the storm pressed close outside. The children leaned against each other, half-listening, half-dreaming, their imaginations painting pictures in the firelight.

Now and then, Father added a memory of his own — tales of winters when he was a boy, how he and his brothers had huddled around a single lantern, playing games until the wick burned low. He spoke of nights when food was scarce, when even a pan of cornbread felt like a feast, and how those nights still lived in his heart because they had been together. “It isn’t the food or the games that make it sweet,” he said, glancing around the room, “it’s us — gathered here, safe and sound.”

Mother nodded, her eyes warm over the rim of her mug. She knew it was true. She had learned that it didn’t take much to make a night meaningful. A few candles, a story, a simple game, a plate of something sweet — that was enough. In fact, it was more than enough, for it stitched the family together with threads stronger than the fiercest wind outside.

As the evening stretched on, Emma fetched her knitting and Mary began a quiet song, her young voice weaving through the lamplight like a gentle thread. Father joined her, his deep baritone grounding the melody, until soon the whole family was singing. The baby clapped her small hands, delighted by the sound, while Thomas tapped his foot to the rhythm. Their voices, though imperfect, rose with sincerity, filling the house with warmth that reached beyond the walls, as though heaven itself leaned in to listen.

The clock ticked steadily, marking the slow passing of time. Outside, snow continued to drift across the prairie, muffling the world in silence. Inside, however, time seemed to pause, suspended in the glow of lamplight, the hum of voices, the comfort of being together.

When the book was closed and the last hymn sung, Father gathered the children for prayer. Kneeling together on the quilt, their heads bowed, they thanked the Lord for the warmth of fire and food, for the safety of shelter, and for the love of family. Their prayers were simple, but sincere, and as they rose again, there was a peace in the room that no storm could touch.

One by one, the children were tucked into their beds, quilts pulled high, goodnight kisses pressed to foreheads still warm from the fire. In the quiet that followed, Mother and Father sat together by the stove, the house finally hushed. They didn't need many words. The night itself had said all that mattered.

For years to come, those evenings would linger in memory. Not because of any grand gesture, but because of the steady rhythm of love and presence. In the hearts of the children, the image would remain: the glow of the lamp, the taste of cocoa, the sound of laughter, the warmth of prayer. They would remember what it felt like to belong, to be gathered close, to be part of a family that chose, again and again, to draw inward on winter nights.

And when they were grown, with homes of their own, they would find themselves reaching for those same rhythms — a pot of cocoa on the stove, a quilt spread on the floor, a book read aloud in the lamplight. Because family nights in were never just about passing time. They were about shaping hearts, binding love, and echoing the eternal truth: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

## Comfort Foods

### 1. Homemade Soft Pretzels with Cheese Dip

There's something about making pretzels as a family — rolling ropes of dough, twisting them into knots, laughing when they turn out misshapen but still delicious. These golden, chewy pretzels disappear fast.

#### Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups warm water
- 1 packet (2 ¼ tsp) yeast
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 4 cups flour
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp butter, melted
- 10 cups water + ⅔ cup baking soda (for boiling)
- 1 egg, beaten (for brushing)
- Coarse salt

#### Cheese Dip

- 2 Tbsp butter
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 1 cup milk
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheddar
- Salt & pepper

#### Directions

1. Mix warm water, yeast, and sugar; let foam 5 minutes. Add flour, salt, butter; knead into a smooth dough. Rise 1 hour.
2. Preheat oven to 450°F. Cut dough into pieces, roll into ropes, shape pretzels.
3. Boil each pretzel 30 seconds in baking soda water; place on baking sheet.
4. Brush with egg wash, sprinkle salt, and bake 12–15 minutes until golden.
5. For cheese dip: Melt butter, whisk flour, add milk, stir until thick. Add cheese, season, and stir smooth.

**Cook's Note:** Don't worry about perfect shapes — the fun is in the twisting, and the taste is always good.

## 2. Popcorn Three Ways (Sweet, Savory, Spiced)

Popcorn is the sound of family nights: the pop, pop, pop echoing in the kitchen before everyone grabs a handful. Why stop at butter when you can make three bowls to suit every taste?

### Base Ingredients

- ½ cup popcorn kernels
- 2 Tbsp oil

### Toppings

- *Sweet*: Melted butter + cinnamon sugar
- *Savory*: Melted butter + grated Parmesan + garlic powder
- *Spiced*: Melted butter + chili powder + smoked paprika + pinch of salt

### Directions

1. Heat oil in a large pot, add kernels, cover, and shake until popping slows.
2. Divide popcorn into three bowls. Toss each with melted butter and toppings.

**Cook's Note:** Let each family member claim their favorite bowl — and sneak from each other's when no one's looking.

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## 3. Build-Your-Own Personal Pizzas

There's nothing cozier than everyone creating their own pizza. Flour on the counter, toppings scattered in bowls, laughter as each person crafts something just for themselves.

### Ingredients

- 1 batch pizza dough (store-bought or homemade)
- Pizza sauce
- Shredded mozzarella
- Toppings: pepperoni, peppers, mushrooms, onions, olives, sausage, pineapple — whatever you love

### Directions

1. Divide dough into 4–6 pieces, roll into small circles.
2. Spread with sauce, sprinkle cheese, and add toppings.
3. Bake at 450°F for 10–12 minutes until crust is golden and cheese bubbly.

**Cook's Note:** Kids love the ownership — and sometimes the strangest combinations end up being the most delicious.

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#### **4. Hot Chocolate Bar with Toppings**

Sometimes a family night doesn't need food so much as a mug of something warm and cheerful. A hot chocolate bar makes even an ordinary night special.

##### **Ingredients**

- 4 cups milk
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- Pinch salt

##### **Toppings**

Marshmallows, whipped cream, crushed candy canes, chocolate chips, sprinkles, cinnamon sticks

##### **Directions**

1. In a saucepan, whisk milk, cocoa, sugar, vanilla, and salt until hot and smooth.
2. Pour into mugs and let everyone pile on their own toppings.

**Cook's Note:** It's not about fancy — it's about joy. Kids will remember the marshmallow towers long after the cocoa is gone.

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#### **5. Sloppy Joes on Toasted Buns**

Sloppy Joes are a little messy, a little fun, and a whole lot of comfort. They're perfect for family nights where laughter matters more than neatness.

##### **Ingredients**

- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 1 small onion, diced
- ½ cup ketchup
- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp mustard
- Salt and pepper
- 6 toasted buns

##### **Directions**

1. Brown meat with onion; drain excess fat.
2. Stir in ketchup, brown sugar, Worcestershire, mustard, salt, and pepper.
3. Simmer 10 minutes until thickened. Serve on toasted buns.

**Cook's Note:** There's no wrong way to eat a Sloppy Joe — except politely. Messy is part of the fun.

## 6. Homemade Oven Fries

What's a Sloppy Joe without crispy fries? Oven fries are golden, salty, and healthier than deep-fried, but no less comforting.

### Ingredients

- 4 large russet potatoes
- 3 Tbsp oil
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- Salt & pepper

### Directions

1. Cut potatoes into wedges or sticks. Soak in cold water 30 minutes (for crispiness). Drain and pat dry.
2. Toss with oil, paprika, garlic, salt, and pepper.
3. Spread on a baking sheet. Bake at 425°F for 25–30 minutes, flipping once.

**Cook's Note:** Serve in a big bowl in the middle of the table — nothing fancy, just hands reaching in and happiness shared.

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## 7. Caramel Apple Slices (Rolled in Toppings)

Whole caramel apples are wonderful, but slices make them easier for little hands — and everyone can pick their own toppings.

### Ingredients

- 4 apples, sliced thick
- 1 bag soft caramels
- 2 Tbsp milk
- Toppings: crushed nuts, sprinkles, mini chocolate chips, crushed cookies

### Directions

1. Melt caramels with milk until smooth.
2. Dip apple slices halfway into caramel. Roll in toppings.
3. Place on wax paper to set.

**Cook's Note:** This is finger food at its finest. Everyone laughs when caramel drips — it's part of the charm.

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## 8. Loaded Nacho Skillet

Nachos bring everyone around the table — no plates needed, just a shared dish in the center that says, *dig in together*.

### Ingredients

- Tortilla chips
- 2 cups shredded cheese
- 1 cup cooked ground beef or beans
- ½ cup diced tomatoes
- ½ cup black beans
- ¼ cup sliced olives
- Jalapeños, sour cream, guacamole (optional)

### Directions

1. Spread chips in an ovenproof skillet. Layer with beef/beans, cheese, tomatoes, olives, and beans.
2. Bake at 400°F for 10 minutes until cheese melts.
3. Serve hot with toppings on the side.

**Cook's Note:** Nachos are best eaten elbow-to-elbow, reaching in without fuss. They taste like fun.

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## 9. Ice Cream Sundae Night

Yes, even in winter — maybe *especially* in winter. There's something delightful about piling toppings high when the snow swirls outside.

### Ingredients

- Ice cream (vanilla, chocolate, or your favorites)
- Toppings: hot fudge, caramel sauce, sprinkles, whipped cream, cherries, crushed cookies, nuts

### Directions

1. Scoop ice cream into bowls.
2. Set toppings out buffet-style and let everyone build their own sundae.

**Cook's Note:** Family nights are about joy, and nothing says joy quite like too much whipped cream and a cherry on top.

## Activities & Traditions

When the days grow short and the nights stretch long, family traditions take on a glow of their own. They don't need to be fancy — the most lasting ones are often the simplest. Family nights in are about *connection* more than perfection, about warmth that lingers longer than the cocoa or the snacks.

### For Younger Children

- **Pretzel Twisting Night:** Let little hands roll ropes of dough and try their best at knots. Even if they don't look like pretzels, they'll taste wonderful — and the laughter will be the best part.
- **Story Lantern Evenings:** Turn off the lights, light a lantern or a few candles, and read aloud while they sip cocoa. Shadows dancing on the wall will turn the story into an adventure.
- **Build-a-Pizza Play:** Give them mini crusts and bowls of toppings. The pride they take in serving "their" pizza to the family will light up their faces.

### For Teens

- **Game Tournament Nights:** Pick a board game or card game, keep score, and let the winner choose the next family meal or dessert. A little competition keeps things lively.
- **DIY Nacho or Sundae Bar:** Teens love customizing. Give them free rein with toppings and watch creativity bloom — sometimes the messier, the better.
- **Movie + Discussion Tradition:** Watch a family-friendly film together, then linger over cocoa and talk about its themes. It's a natural way to spark deeper conversations.

### For Families Together

- **Hot Chocolate Bar Tradition:** Choose one night a week to set out cocoa and toppings. The predictability becomes something everyone looks forward to.

- **Family Talent Evening:** Sing, recite poetry, tell jokes, or play instruments. It doesn't matter if anyone's "good" — the point is to celebrate each other's gifts.
- **Prayer & Gratitude Circle:** Before bed, sit in a circle and let each person name one thing they're thankful for. These small moments become anchors for the soul.
- **Sloppy Joe + Fries Night:** Make it casual — serve everything on platters, skip the formality, and laugh around the table. These laid-back nights are often the most memorable.

## Closing Reflection

A family night in may look ordinary from the outside — a game spread on the table, a plate of nachos, laughter rising and falling. But within those walls, something holy is happening. Bonds are being strengthened, memories are being written, and hearts are being knit together.

In a culture that often values busyness and outside pursuits, choosing to stay in and be present with one another is a quiet act of resistance — and an act of love. It says, *We belong together. This time matters. You matter.*

The Bible reminds us that two are better than one, that households can choose to serve the Lord, and that we are not to neglect gathering. Every family night in is a way of living out those truths. It's not about doing something elaborate; it's about being faithful in the little things — showing up, being present, making space for laughter, conversation, prayer, and simple joy.

One day, the details of these nights may fade — the exact games, the specific foods, the way the snow fell against the windows. But the memory of belonging, of being loved and included, will last a lifetime. And in that, the Lord is honored.

## Closing Reflection Questions

1. What tends to keep me from setting aside intentional time for family nights in?
2. How might I simplify our evenings so there's more room for togetherness?
3. What small tradition could we start this winter that would bring our family closer?

4. How can I use family nights as opportunities to quietly weave Scripture, prayer, or worship into the rhythm of our home?
5. Looking ahead, what do I hope my children (or loved ones) will remember about winter evenings in our household?

## Chapter 5: Enjoying the Outdoors

### Scripture Reading

#### **Job 12:7–9 (NLT)**

*"Just ask the animals, and they will teach you. Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you. Speak to the earth, and it will instruct you. Let the fish in the sea speak to you. For they all know that my disaster has come from the hand of the Lord."*

#### **Psalms 19:1 (AMP)**

*The heavens are telling of the glory of God;  
And the expanse [of heaven] is declaring the work of His hands.*

#### **Isaiah 55:12 (NLT)**

*"You will live in joy and peace. The mountains and hills will burst into song, and the trees of the field will clap their hands!"*

### Devotional:

There's something about stepping outside on a winter's day that awakens the soul in a way no other season quite can. The air is sharper, cleaner, and somehow more honest. Whether your winters come with deep snow that crunches under your boots, or simply with crisp mornings where your breath makes clouds in the air, the outdoors invites us to slow down, to notice, to marvel.

Winter often gets misunderstood. We think of it as a season of barrenness, of emptiness. The fields lie still, the gardens are quiet, the trees bare. But if we're willing to step outside and linger long enough, we find it's not empty at all — it's brimming with God's presence, whispered in ways that demand stillness to hear.

Take the simple act of a walk. Maybe you bundle up, pulling on boots and scarves, or maybe it's just a jacket zipped high and your hands stuffed in pockets.

With each step, you begin to notice the little things: the way frost laces the grass in a delicate silver sheen, the way bare tree branches etch patterns against a pale sky, the way birds gather in clusters, busy even in the cold. Creation has slowed, yes, but it has not stopped. And in that slowness, it points us back to a God who sustains everything — even in the seasons of waiting.

Job reminds us to look to the animals and the earth itself, because they testify to God's hand (Job 12:7–9). In winter, this feels especially true. The earth is pared back to essentials, uncluttered, teaching us lessons about rest and trust. The sparrows still find food. The deer still make their paths. The trees, though bare, are not dead; they are conserving, preparing for the season when life bursts forth again. The land is quiet, but it is not abandoned — and neither are we.

When we go outdoors in winter, we're reminded that God's glory isn't confined to blooming gardens or golden harvests. Psalm 19 says the heavens declare His glory — and they do so just as much on a stark January evening as they do in a June sunset. Step outside on a clear winter night and look up: the stars seem sharper, brighter, closer. It's as though the dark, cold canvas makes the heavens even more radiant.

And there's joy here too. Isaiah tells us the mountains and hills will burst into song, the trees clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12). Can't you almost hear it in the crunch of your boots on fresh snow, or the whoosh of sled runners gliding down a hill, or even the whistle of a cold wind through the branches? Creation doesn't stop praising in the winter. It sings differently, but it sings all the same.

The truth is, winter outdoors can feel like work — shoveling paths, scraping windshields, bundling up just to take the trash out. It can feel inconvenient and harsh. But if we never look past the discomfort, we miss the invitation. God has something to say to us in the silence of snow-covered fields, in the stillness of frozen ponds, in the breath of crisp morning air.

Maybe you can't manage a long hike in the cold, but you can step onto your porch with a warm mug and pause for just a moment. Maybe you can walk slowly around the block, noticing the small things that shift each day. Maybe, if you do live where snow falls, you can let yourself play in it again — make a snow angel, toss a snowball, or simply stand still and let the flakes collect on your coat like a gentle reminder of His creativity.

One of the gifts of winter is that it slows us down. You can't rush across an icy sidewalk — you have to step carefully. You can't plant a garden — you have to wait. The season itself insists on patience. And in that slowing, our souls are given a chance to breathe, to settle, to notice. The outdoor world in winter becomes a mirror of our spiritual lives. Sometimes God calls us to a season where it looks like little is happening, but underneath, roots are deepening, foundations are strengthening, and life is quietly preparing to bloom again.

It's worth asking yourself: what might God be preparing in me this winter? Am I willing to be still long enough to hear Him? The trees are not anxious about their barrenness; they trust the rhythm God set in motion. The birds are not worried about food tomorrow; they trust provision will come. If creation itself rests in God's care, how much more should we, His children, learn to lean into that same trust?

Spending time outdoors in winter shapes us spiritually because it teaches us to embrace seasons of quiet. We are so used to filling our lives with noise and motion. Winter outdoors resists that — it's slower, more spacious, more silent. And in that silence, we can hear God's whisper a little more clearly.

So, don't hide indoors all season long. Step out, breathe deep, and let creation remind you of truths you already know but so easily forget: God is Creator. God is Sustainer. God is with you — in every season.

## Reflection Questions

1. When you step outside in winter, what's the first thing you tend to notice? How might God use that to draw your attention to Him?
2. How does creation in its quiet, waiting season remind you of your own seasons of waiting?
3. What small, intentional way could you enjoy the outdoors this week — even if it's just for a few minutes?
4. Think about Psalm 19:1 — "The heavens declare the glory of God." When was the last time you paused to marvel at the sky in winter?
5. How can you let the outdoors, even in its stillness, become part of your worship and gratitude this season?

## **The Winter Walk**

The wind had calmed overnight, leaving the prairie wrapped in a quiet so deep that even the trees seemed to be holding their breath. Snow lay across the fields like a great quilt, stitched together with seams of fence lines and hedgerows. The farmhouse windows were edged with frost, lacework painted by the cold, and the old barn roof sagged gently beneath its thick white burden.

Inside the house, the fire in the stove still glowed faintly from the embers Father had banked before bed. Mother rose first, as she often did, pulling her shawl close around her shoulders while she coaxed the flames to life. Soon the smell of coffee drifted through the rooms, mingling with the faint sweetness of oats simmering on the stove.

Mary stirred in the bedroom she shared with Emma and little Ruth. The air was sharp against her cheeks as she pulled the quilt higher, but the sound of Mother humming told her morning was already in full swing. With a shiver, she swung her legs to the braided rug and hurried to dress, her breath puffing into small clouds in the cool room.

By the time she made her way downstairs, Thomas was already at the table, cheeks pink from having dashed out to break the ice on the animals' water trough. His mittens steamed faintly on the chair beside him.

"Cold out there?" Father asked with a grin, ruffling Thomas's hair as he came in from carrying wood.

"Cold enough to freeze a man solid," Thomas declared, proud of his chore, though his nose still dripped from the cold. Mother set bowls of steaming porridge on the table, and for a few moments, the only sound was the clink of spoons and the satisfied sighs of warmth returning to chilled fingers.

After grace was spoken and breakfast nearly finished, Father leaned back in his chair and looked around the table.

"The air's still today," he said. "No wind to cut through you. I think we ought to take advantage of it. A walk down by the creek might do us good."

The children's faces lit up, each in their own way. Emma thought of the quiet beauty of the trees by the water. Thomas, of course, thought of snowballs. Even little Ruth clapped her hands against her highchair tray, though she understood only that everyone else was pleased.

By midmorning, they were bundled in layers — wool socks, scarves, mittens, and coats. Mary wrapped her own scarf twice around her neck and tugged her bonnet low, feeling that familiar thrill of stepping outside into air that seemed to sparkle with cold. The sun hung pale in the winter sky, casting a glow that made the snow look almost blue in places.

The path to the creek was half-buried, but Father led the way with sure steps, breaking a trail through the drifts. Each breath puffed into the air like smoke, and the only sounds were the crunch of boots on snow and the occasional soft laugh from one of the children. The world was hushed, as though creation itself had pressed pause.

When they reached the stand of bare cottonwoods by the creek, the family spread out a little. The creek itself lay under a skin of ice, with only a thin ribbon of water moving in the center. Emma crouched to look closer, watching the way the ice caught the light, while Thomas immediately began to pack snow into lopsided balls.

Father pointed out the tracks of a rabbit, faint but clear against the snow. "See how they bound?" he explained, tracing the pattern with his mitten. "Always in sets of four. That's how you know."

Mary leaned closer, marveling. It felt like a secret message written just for them, proof that life still moved through the stillness.

Mother, carrying Ruth, stood quietly, her breath rising in gentle clouds as she watched her children. The quiet of the place seemed to settle into her soul.

Later, she would tell Mary that it was moments like these that reminded her of God's nearness — not in the noise of daily tasks, but in the hush of creation.

They walked further, their steps slower now, as though each of them sensed there was something sacred about this pause in the day. Emma gathered twigs coated in frost, arranging them into patterns on the snow. Thomas gave in to his urge and launched a snowball squarely at Mary, who shrieked before laughing and returning the favor. Soon the air was full of soft thuds and laughter, until Father raised his hand with mock sternness.

"Easy now, or we'll all be soaked through," he said, though his smile gave him away.

When they finally grew tired, they gathered beneath a tree, stamping their feet to keep warm. Father drew from his coat pocket a small bundle Mother had prepared — slices of bread spread with apple butter and wrapped in a cloth. Though simple, the bread tasted richer out here, with the cold air biting their noses and the sunlight slanting low through the trees.

As they ate, a flock of birds passed overhead, their wings beating in rhythm, their cries sharp and bright in the quiet air. Everyone looked up, watching as they cut across the pale sky.

"Even they know where they're going," Mother said softly. "The Lord directs them, just as He directs us." Mary tucked those words into her heart. Somehow, the stillness of the creek, the crunch of their boots, the warmth of bread shared beneath bare trees — it all seemed to hold more meaning than the busiest of days indoors.

When they finally turned back, the house came into view across the snowy fields, smoke curling steadily from the chimney. It looked smaller against the wide prairie, but somehow stronger too, a beacon of warmth in the stark white world.

By the time they reached the porch, their cheeks were flushed, their mittens damp, and their spirits full. The door creaked open, releasing a wave of warm air that smelled of beans simmering and cornbread browning. They shed their layers in a noisy heap and crowded close to the stove, their laughter lingering in the air.

That night, when Father read aloud from the Bible and the children drowsed against the sound of his voice, Mary thought back to the walk. The cold, the quiet, the bread shared beneath the sky — it had all been simple, yet it had filled her heart in a way she couldn't quite explain.

Years later, she would remember that day by the creek, not for any grand event, but for the way it taught her to step outside, to listen, to notice. It was in the winter silence that she first understood how creation itself whispers of God's faithfulness — and how even the coldest season carries the warmth of His presence.

## Comfort Foods

### 1. Roast Chicken with Herbs & Root Vegetables

There's nothing like walking into a house that smells of roast chicken after you've been out in the cold. The savory herbs and the sweetness of roasted carrots and potatoes make it the kind of meal that feels like home the second you step inside.

#### Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken (about 4–5 lbs)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil or melted butter
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp dried rosemary
- 4–5 carrots, cut into chunks
- 4–5 potatoes, cut into wedges
- 1 onion, quartered
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled

#### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Pat chicken dry with paper towels for crisp skin.
2. Rub with oil or butter and season generously with salt, pepper, thyme, and rosemary.
3. Place vegetables in a roasting pan, set the chicken on top so the juices baste everything together.
4. Roast 1 hour 15 minutes until skin is golden and juices run clear.
5. Rest 10 minutes before carving.

*Cook's Note:* The leftovers make the best soup — a natural follow-up to another winter day outside.

## **2. Scalloped Potatoes with Cream & Cheese**

Few things hit the spot after sledding or shoveling like a bubbling dish of scalloped potatoes. Creamy, golden, and rich, it's comfort food that makes the table feel abundant without being fussy.

### **Ingredients**

- 4 large russet potatoes, thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (optional, but wonderful)
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- Pinch of nutmeg (optional)

### **Directions**

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Grease a 9x13 dish.
2. Melt butter, whisk in flour, and cook 1 minute. Gradually add milk until smooth and thickened. Stir in cheese, salt, pepper, and nutmeg.
3. Layer half the potatoes, pour half the sauce, repeat layers.
4. Cover with foil, bake 40 minutes. Uncover and bake 20 more until golden.

*Cook's Note:* These reheat beautifully, which makes them handy for busy days when everyone's in and out of the cold at different times.

### 3. Cranberry-Glazed Meatballs

These sweet-and-savory meatballs are the perfect thing to snack on when you come back inside. They're warming, bite-sized, and have just the right tangy kick to brighten a winter table.

#### Ingredients

- 1 lb ground beef (or a mix of beef and pork)
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- 1 can (14 oz) jellied cranberry sauce
- 1 cup chili sauce (or ketchup, in a pinch)

#### Directions

1. Mix meat, crumbs, egg, onion, salt, and pepper. Shape into small balls.
2. Bake at 375°F for 20 minutes.
3. Melt cranberry sauce in a saucepan, stir in chili sauce. Heat until smooth.
4. Add meatballs, simmer 10 minutes.

*Cook's Note:* Serve them straight from the pan with toothpicks while everyone peels off snowy layers — they'll disappear fast.

#### **4. Homemade Dinner Rolls (Soft & Buttery)**

When you've been out in the cold, there's nothing more welcoming than warm rolls straight from the oven. These are soft, golden, and the perfect companion to stew or soup.

##### **Ingredients**

- 1 cup warm milk
- 2 ¼ tsp yeast (1 packet)
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 3 Tbsp butter, melted
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 cups flour (plus more as needed)
- 2 Tbsp butter for brushing

##### **Directions**

1. Stir yeast and sugar into warm milk; let stand 5 minutes.
2. Add butter, salt, flour; knead until smooth. Let rise 1 hour.
3. Punch down, shape into 12 rolls, place in greased pan.
4. Let rise 30 minutes. Bake 15–18 minutes at 375°F until golden.
5. Brush with butter immediately.

*Cook's Note:* Best eaten steaming with butter melting into the cracks. Keep extras to dip in tomorrow's soup.

## 5. Cornbread Salad

This layered dish brings color and freshness to the winter table. It's hearty enough to serve as a side to roasted meats but cheerful enough to brighten even the grayest day.

### Ingredients

- 6 cups crumbled cornbread
- 1 can (15 oz) pinto beans, rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz) corn, drained
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1 tomato, chopped
- ½ red onion, finely chopped
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 6 strips bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 packet ranch dressing mix

### Directions

1. Mix mayo, sour cream, and ranch packet for dressing.
2. In a clear bowl, layer half the cornbread, beans, corn, veggies, cheese, bacon, and dressing. Repeat.
3. Chill 2 hours before serving.

*Cook's Note:* It's rustic and hearty but still fresh enough to balance rich winter foods.

## 6. Chocolate Layer Cake

There's no better way to finish a cold day than a thick slice of chocolate cake. Moist, rich, and timeless — the kind that makes a winter evening feel like a celebration.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups sugar
- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cocoa powder
- 2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup oil
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup hot coffee (or water)

### Frosting:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cocoa powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

### Directions

1. Preheat oven 350°F. Grease two 9-inch pans.
2. Combine dry ingredients. Mix wet in another bowl, then combine. Stir in hot coffee until smooth.
3. Bake 30–35 minutes. Cool completely.
4. Frost with whipped-together frosting.

*Cook's Note:* Even better the next day — though it rarely lasts that long.

## 7. Winter Fruit Crisp with Oatmeal Topping

The simplest way to enjoy fruit in winter is to tuck it under a buttery oat topping. Apples, pears, or frozen berries all work — the smell alone is worth making it.

### Ingredients

- 6 cups fruit (apples, pears, peaches, or berries)
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp flour
- 1 tsp cinnamon

### Topping:

- 1 cup oats
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup butter, cubed

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Toss fruit with sugar, flour, and cinnamon. Spread in dish.
2. Mix topping until crumbly, sprinkle over fruit.
3. Bake 35–40 minutes until bubbly and golden.

*Cook's Note:* Best with cream poured right over top while it's still warm.

## 8. Hummingbird Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting

This spiced, fruit-studded cake feels like sunshine on the table during the gray months. Moist with bananas and pineapple, it's rich but refreshing — a lovely way to end a hearty meal.

### Ingredients

- 3 cups flour
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup oil
- 1 ½ tsp vanilla
- 1 cup crushed pineapple (with juice)
- 2 cups mashed ripe bananas
- 1 cup chopped pecans

### Frosting:

- 8 oz cream cheese
- ½ cup butter
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

### Directions

1. Preheat oven 350°F. Grease pans.
2. Mix dry ingredients, stir in eggs, oil, vanilla. Fold in pineapple, bananas, pecans.
3. Bake 25–30 minutes. Cool completely.
4. Beat frosting ingredients and frost generously.

*Cook's Note:* This cake stays moist for days, making it perfect for winter gatherings where dessert should linger a little.

## Activities & Traditions

### For Younger Kids

1. **Winter Scavenger Hunt**

Bundle up and head outside with a simple list: pinecones, animal tracks, a feather, something red, something round. Kids love “collecting” with their eyes (or in a basket if appropriate), and it helps them notice details in God’s creation.

2. **Snow Painting (or Sidewalk Art in Snow-Free Areas)**

Fill spray bottles with water and a few drops of food coloring. Let kids spray the snow into rainbows, shapes, or letters. If there’s no snow, chalk art on the driveway gives the same creative spark.

3. **Animal Watch**

Pick a window and keep a “winter animal journal.” Younger ones can draw what they see — birds at a feeder, squirrels chasing, even neighbor’s dogs romping in the snow.

### For Teens

1. **Winter Photography Challenge**

Encourage teens to take photos of the outdoors: sunlight on snow, frost patterns on windows, or cozy scenes inside after coming back in. Turn it into a slideshow to share as a family.

2. **Snow Fort or Winter Obstacle Course**

Give teens ownership of building something fun outdoors — a fort, snow maze, or even a challenge course. If you live where snow isn’t common, let them set up a backyard night hike with lanterns.

3. **Host the Cocoa Station**

Teens love being “in charge.” Set them up to run a hot cocoa bar after a family walk — different toppings like whipped cream, marshmallows, peppermint sticks, or sprinkles.

## **For Families Together**

### **1. Evening Winter Walks**

Bundle everyone up and take a slow stroll after supper. Notice the stars, the crunch of snow, or the quiet of winter air. Short, simple, but bonding.

### **2. Outdoor Fire & Storytelling**

If you have a safe fire pit, light a small outdoor fire. Share family stories, sing a song, or read a short devotional together under blankets. If not, create the same cozy feeling indoors with candles or lanterns.

### **3. Hospitality in Winter**

Pick a night for "Soup & Friends." Invite neighbors or another family over for a simple soup supper. It doesn't have to be fancy — the warmth of company and food makes it memorable.

## **Closing Reflection**

Winter often nudges us inward — toward hearth, toward comfort, toward rest. Yet stepping outside, even for a few minutes, reminds us that God’s creation keeps speaking, even in the cold and quiet. The bare branches, the crisp air, the hush of a snowy field all testify that His hand is still at work, sustaining life in every season.

When we choose to walk outdoors, we’re not just moving our bodies. We’re opening our hearts. We’re allowing God’s quiet artistry to draw our attention back to Him. The frost that etches a windowpane, the soft crunch of footsteps in snow, the stillness that seems to slow time — each of these moments becomes a whisper of His presence.

As you enjoy winter’s outdoors this season, don’t rush past the silence. Let it settle. Let it remind you that God is near, even in the seasons that feel barren or long. The One who clothes the sparrows, who watches over the deer paths, who paints the stars sharper against the night sky, is the same One who tends your life.

Winter doesn’t last forever. The earth is simply resting, preparing. And so are we. But even in this waiting season, there is beauty to see and joy to gather — if we will only step outside and notice.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. When was the last time you took a quiet walk outdoors in winter? What details did you notice about God’s creation?
2. How do you tend to view winter — as a hardship to endure or a gift with its own lessons? Why?
3. Psalm 19 says “the heavens declare the glory of God.” How does the winter sky or landscape remind you of His glory?

4. What “stillness” is God inviting you into during this season? How can you create space to listen?
  
5. Is there a way you can make a new winter tradition — a walk, an outdoor activity, or simply pausing on the porch — to remind yourself of His presence in creation?

## Chapter 6: Hospitality in Winter

### Scripture Reading

**Romans 12:13 (NLT)**

*"When God's people are in need, be ready to help them.  
Always be eager to practice hospitality."*

**1 Peter 4:9 (AMP)**

*"Be hospitable to one another without complaint."*

**Hebrews 13:2 (NLT)**

*"Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!"*

### Devotional

Winter can feel like a season of closing doors — the cold drives us indoors, and it's easy to settle into routines that keep us wrapped in our own little worlds. Yet Scripture calls us to something more: to open wide our homes, our tables, and our hearts, even in the seasons that feel most closed off. Hospitality, especially in winter, is both a practice of faith and a gift of love.

Think about the way warmth feels in January. When you step inside from the biting wind and your body begins to thaw, you know relief in a way that is almost holy. That's the picture God paints for us with hospitality. It isn't about perfection or performance — it's about creating spaces where others feel the love and presence of Christ through our welcome.

Hospitality doesn't require a fancy home or a table groaning with food. Sometimes, the most meaningful hospitality is a steaming mug placed into cold hands, a chair pulled close to the fire, or a bowl of soup shared at a humble kitchen table. What matters isn't the polish, but the presence — the willingness to make space in your life for another soul.

Jesus modeled this for us so beautifully. Over and over, we see Him eating with people. Meals were His ministry space: with tax collectors, with His disciples, with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. He turned water into wine to extend a celebration; He multiplied loaves and fish to feed the hungry crowd; He broke bread at the Last Supper to show us what His sacrifice meant. Hospitality, for Jesus, wasn't an event — it was a way of life.

And what a countercultural call it is in winter. The world says, "Stay in. Protect yourself. Keep to your own." But God says, "Open up. Share what you have. Invite someone in." There's something about hospitality in winter that feels especially powerful. Imagine being a weary traveler in ancient times, finding not only shelter from the cold but food and kindness offered by strangers. Hebrews 13:2 reminds us that in showing such welcome, "some have entertained angels without realizing it." Could it be that the knock on your door, the phone call asking to visit, the nudge in your heart to reach out, is an invitation from God Himself to host His presence?

Winter hospitality may look different for each of us. For some, it's inviting friends over for a simple soup night, no frills, no pressure. For others, it's offering a guest room or even just a couch to someone who needs rest. It might mean checking on a neighbor with a hot casserole or inviting a lonely co-worker to join your family for Sunday dinner. It could be as small as setting an extra mug of cocoa at the table for the child next door.

And yes, hospitality will sometimes feel inconvenient. It may come when the house is messy, when the budget is stretched, when your own energy is low. But these are the very moments when God's grace shines brightest, because it was never meant to be about our strength — it is His Spirit working through our open hands.

Hospitality also blesses us in ways we don't always expect. When we practice it, our hearts grow softer, our gratitude deepens, and our eyes open wider to God's provision. Inviting others in teaches us that joy is multiplied when it's shared. A pot of soup is richer when eaten with laughter. A loaf of bread stretches further when broken together.

Maybe you've hesitated to offer hospitality because you feel inadequate — your house is too small, your cooking too plain, your schedule too full. But God never asked for perfection. He asked for willingness. If all you have is a pot of stew and mismatched mugs, that is more than enough in His hands. What people remember isn't the décor or the dishes. They remember how they felt: welcome, seen, valued, and loved.

And here's the truth — when we welcome others, we mirror the welcome of Christ. He has received us into His household, not because of what we have to offer, but because of His boundless love. Every time we open our doors in His name, we echo His invitation: "Come, you are welcome here."

So this winter, ask the Lord to show you one small way to practice hospitality. It doesn't need to be elaborate or costly. It could be as simple as making extra soup, starting a tradition of inviting someone over once a month, or sending a plate of cookies to the new family in the neighborhood. These gestures may feel small to you, but they can mean everything to someone else.

Hospitality in winter isn't just about keeping the cold out — it's about letting the love of Christ spill out. May your home, however humble, become a refuge of warmth. May your table, however simple, become a place of fellowship. And may your heart, always open to God's nudging, become a vessel of His generous welcome in a season when the world most needs to feel it.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. When you think of hospitality, what comes to mind — stress or joy? How might God be inviting you to shift your perspective?
2. Have you ever experienced hospitality in a way that deeply impacted you? What made it memorable?

3. What holds you back from opening your home or extending invitations to others? How can you surrender those fears to God?
4. How does remembering Jesus' own practice of hospitality — eating with people, serving them at the table — inspire you to do the same?
5. What simple act of hospitality could you practice this week to reflect Christ's welcome to someone else?

## **A Seat at the Table**

The wind had carried the storm across the prairie all day, sweeping the fields until the fences seemed to vanish under white. By evening, the world outside was hushed and hidden, the kind of silence that only comes when snow lies thick and deep. Inside the farmhouse, however, the lamps glowed, the fire burned steady, and the kitchen hummed with quiet preparation.

Mary pulled the last pan of biscuits from the oven, their golden tops steaming as she brushed them with melted butter. The table was nearly set — a pot of stew thick with carrots and potatoes sat at the center, the scent of thyme and slow-simmered broth filling the air. Beside it, she placed jars of pickled beets and a crock of butter. Supper was simple, but hearty — the kind that promised to warm you straight through.

She had just begun to ladle stew into bowls when a knock rattled the front door. The sound startled her; few folks came calling in weather like this. Father rose from his chair and went to answer it, pulling the heavy door open against the wind.

On the porch stood Mr. Hollis, the neighbor from down the road, his hat dusted with snow and his coat stiff with frost. His eyes looked weary, and his hands trembled slightly as he clutched the brim of his hat.

“Evening,” he said, his voice rough. “I hated to trouble you, but I was caught coming back from town. Horse threw a shoe, and I had to walk most the way. Cold cut sharper than I figured. I wondered if—”

He didn’t finish. Father was already stepping aside. “Come in, man, come in,” he said, his voice firm but kind. “No need to stand there and freeze. You’re among friends here.” Mary hurried to clear a chair by the fire, and Mother fetched a quilt from the rocker. In minutes, Mr. Hollis was settled, his boots steaming by the hearth and his hands wrapped around a mug of coffee. He sighed deeply, as though warmth itself was working its way back into his bones.

"Didn't mean to be a bother," he said after a while, looking down into his cup. "I'll just warm a bit, then be on my way." "Nonsense," Mother replied, her tone gentle but firm. "You'll stay for supper, and that's settled. The storm's thickening, and we've more than enough."

And with that, the table was stretched. Another bowl was fetched, more stew ladled out, biscuits piled higher on the plate. The children shifted to make room, scooting closer so that Mr. Hollis had a seat among them.

At first, he seemed uneasy, as if he wasn't sure he belonged at their table. But as the meal began, the warmth of the fire and the steady hum of conversation drew him in. Father asked about the trip to town, and Mother listened with quiet interest. The children chattered, their voices bright, and soon a smile softened the lines of weariness around Mr. Hollis's face.

As the meal went on, the house filled with the sound of laughter and the clatter of spoons against bowls. Mr. Hollis ate heartily, the color returning to his cheeks, and Mary noticed that he lingered over the biscuits, savoring each bite as though it was more than bread — as though it was balm. After supper, Father brought out the old fiddle and played a tune, the notes rising warm and bright against the storm outside. Mr. Hollis sat back, quilt still draped across his shoulders, and his eyes grew soft. For a moment, Mary thought he looked younger, as though the years of hardship and solitude had been lifted.

When at last he stood to leave, he hesitated by the door. "I can't thank you enough," he said, his voice low. "For the meal, for the warmth, for the welcome. I thought I was just stopping to keep from freezing. But tonight...tonight felt like home."

Father clasped his hand firmly. "That's what neighbors are for. Don't forget it."

As the door closed behind him, the family stood in quiet for a moment, listening to the storm press close again. Then Mother spoke softly, almost to herself: "Funny how a little food and a warm fire can mean so much."

Mary carried that thought with her for years. She came to understand that hospitality wasn't always about opening your door to a crowd or preparing something grand. Sometimes, it was as simple as setting one more bowl at the table, one more place by the fire. It was choosing to see the need in front of you and answering it with love.

Long after, when she had a family of her own, Mary made it a practice to keep an extra chair ready, an extra loaf of bread in the cupboard. Not because company always came, but because it might — and when it did, she wanted her table to speak the same word her parents' had spoken that snowy night: "You belong."

And in that belonging, hearts were warmed, storms were softened, and ordinary evenings became holy.

## Comfort Foods

### Italian Meatloaf with Tomato Sauce

There's something about meatloaf that just feels like home, isn't there? It's hearty, stretches to feed a family, and makes the house smell wonderful. This version has a little Italian flair — Parmesan, garlic, herbs — all baked under a rich tomato sauce that turns sticky and flavorful in the oven.

#### Ingredients

- 2 lbs ground beef (or half beef, half pork)
- 1 cup fresh breadcrumbs
- ½ cup milk
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup grated Parmesan
- 2 tsp dried Italian herbs
- 2 Tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 cups tomato sauce (divided)
- 2 Tbsp tomato paste
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- Pinch red pepper flakes (optional)

#### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Grease a loaf pan or line a baking sheet with parchment.
2. Soak breadcrumbs in milk until softened.
3. Mix with beef, eggs, onion, garlic, Parmesan, herbs, parsley, salt, and pepper — gently, so it stays tender.
4. Shape into a loaf.
5. Mix 1 cup tomato sauce with tomato paste, oil, and red pepper flakes. Spread half on top of loaf.
6. Bake 45 minutes. Add the rest of the sauce and bake another 15 minutes.
7. Rest 10 minutes before slicing.

*Cook's Note:* This makes the best meatloaf sandwiches the next day.

## Scalloped Potatoes with Ham

This dish is pure coziness in a pan. Tender slices of potato, tucked in with creamy sauce and bits of smoky ham — bubbling and golden when it comes out of the oven.

### Ingredients

- 2 lbs potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 1 ½ cups diced cooked ham

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13 baking dish.
2. Melt butter in a saucepan, whisk in flour, cook 1 minute. Slowly whisk in milk.
3. Stir in half the cheese, plus salt and pepper.
4. Layer potatoes, ham, and sauce in dish. Repeat.
5. Sprinkle with remaining cheese.
6. Bake 60 minutes until golden and bubbly.
- 7.

*Cook's Note:* Even better reheated the next day.

## Chicken & Drop Dumplings

Few things comfort quite like a pot of chicken and dumplings. The broth is rich, the chicken tender, and the dumplings puff up soft and pillowy right on top.

### Ingredients

- 1 whole chicken (about 4 lbs) or 4–5 bone-in pieces
- 8 cups water or chicken broth
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp pepper

*For the dumplings:*

- 2 cups flour
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 Tbsp melted butter

### Directions

1. Simmer chicken, veggies, salt, and pepper in broth until meat is tender (about 1 hour). Remove chicken, shred, return to pot.
2. Mix dumpling ingredients until you have a thick batter.
3. Drop by spoonfuls into simmering broth. Cover, and whatever you do, don't lift the lid for 15 minutes.
4. Serve hot — dumplings floating on top like clouds.

## Loaded Mashed Potato Casserole

Got mashed potatoes left from last night? This turns them into something spectacular. Creamy, cheesy, topped with bacon — it's a guaranteed favorite.

### Ingredients

- 4 cups mashed potatoes
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded cheddar
- ½ cup mozzarella
- 6 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 2 Tbsp chopped chives
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease an 8x8 dish.
  2. Mix potatoes with sour cream, half the cheese, half the bacon, and chives. Season well.
  3. Spread in dish, top with rest of cheese and bacon.
  4. Bake 25 minutes until bubbly.
- 

## Biscuits with Sausage Gravy

This is the definition of comfort food — tender, fluffy biscuits smothered in creamy sausage gravy.

### Biscuits

- 2 cups flour
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ cup cold butter, cubed
- ¾ cup milk

### Gravy

- 1 lb breakfast sausage
- ¼ cup flour
- 3 cups milk
- Salt and pepper

### Directions

1. For biscuits: Preheat oven to 425°F. Mix dry ingredients, cut in butter until crumbly. Stir in milk. Pat out, cut into rounds, bake 12 minutes.
  2. For gravy: Brown sausage, stir in flour, cook 1 min. Add milk slowly, stirring until thickened. Season well.
  3. Split biscuits, ladle gravy over top.
-

## Apple Butter

Thick, spiced, and spreadable — this is winter in a jar.

### Ingredients

- 6 lbs apples, peeled and chopped
- 4 cups apple cider
- 2 cups sugar (adjust to taste)
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp cloves
- ½ tsp nutmeg

### Directions

1. Cook apples and cider until soft. Puree.
2. Stir in sugar and spices.
3. Simmer low, uncovered, stirring often, until thick and dark (3–4 hours).
4. Store in jars.

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## Peanut Butter Sheet Cake

A nostalgic favorite — warm peanut butter frosting poured right over soft, tender cake.

### Cake

- 2 cups flour
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup peanut butter
- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup milk
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla

### Frosting

- ½ cup peanut butter
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ cup milk
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

### Directions

1. Heat oven to 350°F. Grease a 10x15 pan.
2. Heat water, peanut butter, and butter. Stir into dry ingredients. Add milk, eggs, vanilla. Bake 25 minutes.
3. For frosting: heat peanut butter, butter, and milk. Stir in sugar and vanilla. Pour warm frosting on warm cake.

## **Boston Cream Cupcakes**

A fun twist on a classic pie — golden cupcakes, creamy custard, and glossy chocolate ganache.

### **Cupcakes**

- 1 box yellow cake mix (or homemade yellow cake)

### **Custard Filling**

- 2 cups milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 Tbsp cornstarch
- 4 egg yolks, beaten
- 2 tsp vanilla

### **Ganache**

- 1 cup chocolate chips
- ½ cup cream

### **Directions**

1. Bake cupcakes, cool.
2. Make custard: heat milk, whisk with yolks, sugar, and cornstarch. Cook till thick, stir in vanilla, chill.
3. Make ganache: pour hot cream over chocolate, stir smooth.
4. Fill cupcakes with custard, spoon ganache on top.

## Activities & Traditions

### For Younger Kids

1. **Helper in the Kitchen**

Little ones love to feel useful. Let them mash the potatoes for the casserole, stir the apple butter (with close supervision), or sprinkle cheese on top of the scalloped potatoes. They won't do it perfectly, but that's part of the memory.

2. **Storytime with Soup**

While the chicken and dumplings bubble on the stove, gather them for a read-aloud. The smell of supper mixed with the rhythm of a story settles children in the coziest way.

3. **Homemade Play-Bakery**

Give them a bit of extra biscuit dough to shape into "mini rolls" or "pretend cookies." Bake alongside the real ones. They'll be proud to eat their own creations.

### For Teens

1. **Family Recipe Keeper**

Ask them to handwrite the recipe for meatloaf or sheet cake into a family cookbook or journal. It builds ownership and gives them a sense of carrying tradition forward.

2. **Kitchen DJ**

Teens love music — so let them set the kitchen playlist while everyone cooks together. A few favorite songs turn chopping onions and washing dishes into a good time.

3. **Sweet Sharing**

Have them package up extra peanut butter cake or Boston cream cupcakes for neighbors or grandparents. It's a way to give them responsibility and remind them that food is a gift meant to be shared.

## **For the Whole Family**

### **1. Comfort Food Nights**

Pick one night a week in winter to make one of these recipes together — maybe “Soup Sunday” with dumplings or “Friday Meatloaf Night.” Consistency creates a tradition everyone looks forward to.

### **2. The Grateful Table**

While passing dishes around (especially something simple like biscuits and gravy), pause to let each person name one comfort they’re thankful for that week. Big or small, it shifts the meal from just eating to remembering blessings.

### **3. Kitchen Stories**

As the scalloped potatoes or meatloaf bake, ask older family members to share stories about the meals they grew up with. These conversations tie past and present together in such a natural way.

**The point isn’t perfection — it’s togetherness.** A little mess in the kitchen, some off-key singing while stirring gravy, or a few floury handprints on the counter — those are the things that linger in memory long after the food is gone.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Comfort food is never just about what's on the plate. It's about what happens around the table — the stories told, the prayers whispered, the laughter shared, the silence held together when words aren't needed. Every bowl of soup, every slice of cake, every roll passed across the table is a reminder that God provides not just nourishment for our bodies, but fellowship and comfort for our souls.

Hospitality doesn't have to look like a perfect meal or a spotless kitchen. It can be as simple as a steaming bowl of dumplings set in front of a weary friend, or a cupcake given to a neighbor on a hard day. These small acts ripple outward in ways we may never see, weaving threads of warmth and belonging through the coldest seasons of life.

When we welcome others to our tables — whether it's family gathered close or strangers who become friends — we are echoing the heart of Christ, who always invited, always included, always fed. May we be people who set the table not only with food, but with grace.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. When you think back on your life, what meal or recipe feels most like "home" to you — and why?
2. How can you turn an ordinary meal this week into something special, simply by slowing down or adding one small touch?
3. Who might God be nudging you to invite to your table (or even to share a dish with), to extend comfort and love in this season?
4. In what ways does the Lord's provision — both physical and spiritual — bring comfort to you right now?
5. How can your family create traditions around food that will be remembered years from now?

## Chapter 7: Caring for the Soul

### Scripture Reading

#### **Psalm 46:10 (NLT)**

*"Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world."*

#### **Isaiah 40:31 (AMP)**

*But those who wait for the Lord [who expect, look for, and hope in Him] Will gain new strength and renew their power; They will lift up their wings [and rise up close to God] like eagles [rising toward the sun]; They will run and not become weary, They will walk and not grow tired.*

#### **Matthew 11:28–29 (NLT)**

*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

### Devotional:

When the world outside feels hushed in winter's deep quiet, it is often a mirror for what our own souls long for: rest. We spend so much of our lives rushing from one thing to another — appointments, chores, responsibilities, even good and joyful tasks. Yet beneath all the busyness, our souls hunger for stillness, for time to breathe, for a chance to remember who we belong to and where our strength comes from.

The truth is, soul-care is not a luxury. It isn't something extra we add to our lives if we find spare time. It is essential. Just as our bodies need food, water, and rest, so our inner lives need nourishment, peace, and communion with the Lord. When we neglect this, it shows up in our lives: sharp tempers, weary bodies, restless nights, and anxious hearts. But when we tend to our souls, it is as if living water runs through us — refreshing, strengthening, and steadying us for whatever comes.

Winter provides us with a picture of what this can look like. The fields rest from their labor. Trees shed their leaves and conserve their strength. The land goes still so that in the spring, life can burst forth again. God's creation shows us the wisdom of rhythm, of letting go, of waiting. In the same way, we are not meant to live in constant output. We are not machines, endlessly producing. We are children of God, designed for fellowship with Him, for seasons of quiet, and for renewal.

Jesus Himself modeled this. Again and again in the Gospels, we see Him withdraw to quiet places, away from the crowds, away from the demands, to pray and be with His Father. If the Son of God chose this as His rhythm of life, how much more do we need it? Our souls thrive when we, too, make space to step away — whether that's a few minutes in the morning before the house wakes, a walk in the cold air, or even moments carved out in the evening when the lamps are low and the house is still.

But soul-care isn't only about solitude. It's about what we do with that time. Rest doesn't come from simply ceasing work — it comes from turning our hearts toward the Lord. "Be still and know that I am God." The knowing is as important as the stillness. When we sit in His presence, when we open His Word, when we pray with honesty, our souls are tended in ways nothing else can match. A quiet house doesn't guarantee peace; a quiet heart before God does.

There are many ways to practice this care. For some, it may be Scripture reading, slow and unhurried, not rushing through chapters but lingering over words that breathe life. For others, journaling may be a way to pour out thoughts and see God's hand in them. Some may find peace in worship — singing softly while folding laundry or humming a hymn while cooking supper. Others may meet God in nature — a walk through snowy woods, the sight of frost glittering on the fence posts, the sharp cold air filling the lungs.

What matters most is not the form, but the turning of the heart. Soul-care is not about achieving a perfect quiet time routine or following someone else's plan. It is about allowing God to meet you in the middle of your life, to restore you, to remind you of His presence, and to shape you more into His likeness.

There will always be distractions. The world will always call us to keep moving, keep doing, keep proving our worth. But God invites us into something altogether different: rest. Not laziness, not idleness, but holy rest — the kind that roots us deeper in Him, the kind that makes us whole, the kind that renews our joy and steadies our steps.

The promise of Isaiah 40:31 is one we cling to in these winter days: those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. Waiting is not wasted time. In God's economy, waiting is where our souls learn trust, where our hearts are strengthened, where we exchange our weariness for His power. Like the eagle rising on the wind, we are lifted when we lean into Him.

And so, this winter, let us care for our souls with intention. Let us make space for stillness. Let us turn our eyes upon Jesus. Let us drink deeply of His Word. Let us walk slower, linger longer, and remember that our value does not come from what we accomplish but from Whose we are. The snow-covered fields whisper it, the quiet mornings echo it, the Scriptures proclaim it: rest is holy. Care for your soul is sacred work.

## **Reflection Questions**

1. When was the last time you felt truly rested in your soul, not just your body? What circumstances surrounded that moment?
2. How do you normally respond to seasons of busyness — do you withdraw into stillness, or do you push yourself harder?

3. What distractions most often keep you from making time for rest and being still with God?
4. Which practices (Scripture, prayer, journaling, worship, nature walks, etc.) most refresh your spirit? How could you make space for them this week?
5. In what ways does winter itself invite you to slow down and care for your soul?

## ***The Quiet Place***

The prairie had gone still again, the kind of stillness that only comes in deep winter. Snow stretched in every direction like a white quilt, stitched with fences and shadows. The barn roof carried a thick crown of ice, and smoke rose from the farmhouse chimney in a straight gray column, the air so cold it refused even to stir.

Inside, the house hummed with a different sort of rhythm — quiet but alive. The woodstove glowed, its iron sides radiating steady warmth. Boots and mittens leaned against it, steaming gently, while the air carried the mingled fragrance of coffee, pine kindling, and the faint sweetness of apples Mother had set to bake.

Mary sat near the window, a blanket pulled across her knees, her slate resting on her lap. She had finished her lessons but lingered there, scratching little curls of chalk into the corner of the board. Her younger brother Thomas sprawled on the rug, pushing a block of wood back and forth as if it were a wagon. The rest of the house was hushed, Father out at the barn, Mother moving quietly about the kitchen.

It was in these moments, the still spaces between the louder parts of the day, that Mary felt something she didn't always know how to name — a kind of rest that settled deep inside her.

She could hear the wind outside, faint but constant, pressing against the walls as if to remind them that winter still held its reign. Yet inside, the lamp glowed golden, the stove pulsed red, and there was no hurry in the room. No voices clamoring, no chores demanding. Just the sound of Thomas humming tunelessly, the scratch of chalk, and the soft shifting of her mother's skirts in the kitchen.

Mary leaned her head back against the chair and closed her eyes. It was in moments like this that she remembered her grandmother's words: "*A house can be warm even when the stove burns low — if the hearts inside are at rest.*"

That evening, the family gathered as they often did. Supper was simple: baked apples, thick slices of bread, and a pot of soup that had simmered all afternoon. Father bowed his head in prayer, his voice low and steady: "Thank You, Lord, for the food before us, the fire beside us, and the peace within us." The words lingered like the warmth of the stove, simple yet enough.

After supper, Mother pulled out her worn Bible and read aloud a psalm. The children grew quiet, listening to the cadence of her voice. Then, when the reading was done, they sat in silence for a long moment. Not uncomfortable silence, but the kind that felt like a blanket — soft, covering, and safe.

Father spoke then, not to break the quiet but to guide it. "The soul needs this," he said. "Not only work, not only words, but quiet. Stillness makes room for God to speak." Mary tucked the thought into her heart. She had never thought of stillness as something to do — but now she began to see it was as important as chores or lessons.

Over the days that followed, winter pressed harder. The snow deepened, the nights lengthened, and still the family found their rhythm in the quiet. They began to name it among themselves — "the quiet place."

In the mornings, when the fire was first coaxed to life, Mother would pour coffee into Father's cup and sit beside him for a few minutes before the day's work began. That was their quiet place.

At midday, Mary sometimes slipped out with her shawl wrapped tight, walking just far enough to stand at the fence and listen to the silence of the fields. The snow creaked under her boots, the air stung her cheeks, but in the vast hush of the prairie she felt small and safe all at once. That was her quiet place.

And in the evenings, when the lamps were lit and the children settled with their games or books, Father would tell a story, sometimes from his own boyhood, sometimes one he had heard long ago. The children listened, their hearts slowing to the rhythm of his voice. That, too, was a quiet place.

It was not always easy. There were days when the wind howled so fiercely that the walls shook, when tempers flared after being indoors too long, when chores seemed endless and patience thin. But even then, Mother would remind them: "The Lord invites us to rest, even when the storm is loud."

One night, after the children were tucked into bed, Mary lay awake, listening. The house was hushed except for the groan of the rafters and the sigh of the wind. She thought again of her father's words — that the soul needed quiet as much as it needed food. She whispered a prayer into the darkness, not long or fancy, just a simple one: "Lord, make my heart quiet in You." And in that moment, even as the storm pressed against the house, her spirit felt steady.

The winter passed slowly, as winters do, yet the lessons of those evenings lasted. Mary came to see that soul-care wasn't only in the rare moments of silence, but in choosing to turn toward God in the middle of ordinary life. In a hymn sung while stirring the soup. In a prayer whispered while pulling on mittens. In gratitude spoken before bed.

Years later, when she was grown with a household of her own, she would think back to those evenings on the prairie. When her own children grew restless in winter's grip, she would gather them close and say, "Let's find our quiet place." Sometimes it meant reading a psalm aloud, sometimes it meant sitting together with cocoa and not rushing to fill the silence. Sometimes it meant stepping outside, just for a minute, to let the night air remind them of God's vastness.

The soul was always hungry, she realized — and it was always fed when it turned toward the One who made it.

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## Comfort Foods for the Soul

When life feels heavy, a warm kitchen has a way of lifting the spirit. These recipes are more than meals — they're gentle reminders of care, nourishment, and the joy that comes from slowing down. Each one has a story of comfort tucked inside, waiting to remind us that the Lord provides not just for our needs, but also for our delight.

### 1. Chicken & Wild Rice Soup

There's something healing about soup simmering on the stove. This one is creamy, hearty, and full of flavor — the kind of meal that makes you feel cared for, body and soul.

#### Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery ribs, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup uncooked wild rice (or a wild rice blend)
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 3 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 cup heavy cream (or half-and-half)

#### Instructions:

1. In a large pot, melt butter with olive oil. Sauté onion, carrots, and celery until softened. Add garlic and cook 1 minute.
2. Stir in wild rice, thyme, bay leaf, and broth. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 40–45 minutes, until rice is tender.
3. Add chicken, salt, and pepper. Stir in cream and heat gently. Remove bay leaf before serving.

*This is a "linger at the table" kind of soup — perfect for quiet evenings when everyone needs warming from the inside out.*

## 2. Homemade Parker House Rolls

Few things lift the spirit like fresh, warm bread. These soft, buttery rolls remind us that small things — a roll split open and spread with butter — can bring great joy.

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup warm milk (110°F)
- 2 ¼ tsp active dry yeast
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 3 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 4 Tbsp butter, softened
- 1 egg
- Extra melted butter for brushing

### Instructions:

1. Combine warm milk, yeast, and sugar. Let sit until foamy, 5–10 minutes.
2. Stir in flour, salt, butter, and egg. Knead until smooth (about 8 minutes). Place in a greased bowl, cover, and rise 1 hour.
3. Roll dough and cut into rectangles. Fold in half, brush with butter, and place on a greased baking sheet.
4. Cover and rise another 30 minutes. Bake at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, until golden. Brush with more butter.

*They're best eaten hot — a reminder to savor life's blessings fresh, while they're here in front of us.*

### **3. Cheddar & Broccoli Hand Pies**

Hand pies feel playful, like a meal and a memory tucked in your hand. These are warm, cheesy, and perfect for sharing.

#### **Ingredients:**

- 2 sheets refrigerated pie crust (or homemade)
- 2 cups broccoli florets, steamed and chopped
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 egg, beaten (for sealing and brushing)
- Salt and pepper

#### **Instructions:**

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Roll pie crust slightly thinner and cut into 4–5 inch circles.
2. Mix broccoli and cheddar; season lightly.
3. Place filling in the center of each circle, fold over, and press edges with a fork. Brush tops with egg wash.
4. Bake 18–20 minutes, until golden.

*They're proof that joy doesn't always come in big feasts — sometimes it's just a small pie, warm in hand, and laughter shared around the table.*

## 4. Prairie Baked Beans with Molasses & Bacon

Slow-baked beans teach patience — hours in the oven turning simple ingredients into something rich and deeply satisfying.

### Ingredients:

- 1 lb dried navy beans (or 4 cups cooked beans)
- 6 slices bacon, chopped
- 1 onion, diced
- ½ cup molasses
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 1 Tbsp mustard
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper

### Instructions:

1. If using dried beans, soak overnight and simmer until just tender.
2. Cook bacon until crisp, add onion, and sauté until soft.
3. Combine beans, bacon mixture, molasses, sugar, ketchup, mustard, salt, and pepper in a baking dish. Stir.
4. Cover and bake at 300°F for 2–3 hours, stirring occasionally, until thick and caramelized.

*Like faith, these beans reward steady tending — reminding us that waiting can bring something truly good.*

## 5. Cabbage & Noodles (Haluski-Style)

Simple ingredients — butter, cabbage, onion, and noodles — become comfort when cooked with care. It's a reminder that God often uses the simple to bless us deeply.

### Ingredients:

- 1 head green cabbage, thinly sliced
- 1 onion, sliced
- ½ cup butter
- 12 oz egg noodles
- Salt and pepper

### Instructions:

1. Boil noodles until tender; drain.
2. In a large skillet, melt butter. Add cabbage and onion; cook until caramelized and golden.
3. Toss noodles into skillet, season well, and stir until coated.

*This humble dish is rich in its simplicity — much like a thankful heart.*

## 6. Cranberry Orange Bundt Cake

A bright, cheerful dessert that reminds us joy can be baked right into life. The tartness of cranberries and sweetness of orange come together into a cake that shines.

### Ingredients:

- 2 ½ cups flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 Tbsp orange zest
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries

### Glaze:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 Tbsp orange juice

### Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a bundt pan.
2. Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, one at a time, then zest.
3. Mix dry ingredients separately; add to batter alternately with juice. Fold in cranberries.
4. Bake 50–55 minutes. Cool, then drizzle glaze over top.

*It's the kind of cake that brightens a winter day — a sweet reminder that God sprinkles joy into even the grayest seasons.*

## **7. Snowflake Sugar Bars**

Soft, frosted, and sprinkled with sugar that glitters like fresh snow — these bars are simple, sweet, and a delight to share.

### **Ingredients (Bars):**

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt

### **Ingredients (Frosting):**

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- 2–3 Tbsp milk
- 1 tsp vanilla
- Sparkling sugar

### **Instructions:**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla.
2. Mix in dry ingredients. Spread in a greased 9x13 pan.
3. Bake 20–25 minutes, until golden. Cool.
4. Frost, sprinkle with sugar, and cut into bars.

*They're little squares of happiness — proof that caring for the soul often looks like choosing joy.*

## **8. Hot Vanilla Milk with Cinnamon**

Warm and soothing, this simple drink feels like peace in a mug. It's perfect for winding down or sharing in the quiet of evening.

### **Ingredients:**

- 4 cups milk
- 2 Tbsp sugar or honey
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of nutmeg (optional)

### **Instructions:**

1. Heat milk gently (do not boil).
2. Whisk in sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg.
3. Pour into mugs and sip slowly.

*Sometimes, soul care is as simple as a warm drink — a way of telling yourself, "It's okay to rest."*

## Activities & Traditions

### For Younger Kids

1. **Soup Stirring Helper** – Let little hands sprinkle in rice or stir the broth for the *Chicken & Wild Rice Soup*. As it cooks, talk about how God stirs goodness into our lives, even when we don't see it right away.
2. **Snowflake Bar Decorating** – Give them sprinkles, sugar, or edible glitter to decorate the *Snowflake Sugar Bars*. It's a simple way to let them play and create, while reminding them that each snowflake (and child) is one-of-a-kind.
3. **Milk & a Memory** – Pair *Hot Vanilla Milk with Cinnamon* with a storybook or short devotional before bedtime. End the day warm, both in body and heart.

### For Teens

1. **Bread & Patience Lesson** – Invite teens to try making *Parker House Rolls*. The waiting for dough to rise is a natural picture of patience — and an opening for a heart-to-heart about waiting on God.
2. **Hand Pie Creativity** – Give them the dough and filling for *Cheddar & Broccoli Hand Pies*, but let them create their own designs — maybe a braided edge, or even initials on top. It's cooking as self-expression.
3. **Quiet Kitchen Hour** – While the *Cranberry Orange Bundt Cake* bakes, set out journals or Bibles for quiet reflection. Light a candle. Sometimes the stillness of baking time is just right for soul time.

### For the Whole Family

1. **Soup & Sharing Night** – Serve *Chicken & Wild Rice Soup* and ask each person at the table to share one thing that fed their soul this week (a prayer answered, a kindness, a small joy).

2. **Cabbage & Noodles Gratitude Meal** – As you eat this humble dish, go around and name simple blessings you sometimes overlook — like a warm house, clean water, or even “Mom’s cooking.”
3. **Sweet & Serve Tradition** – Make *Snowflake Bars* or *Cranberry Orange Cake*, then package a few slices to deliver to a neighbor, friend, or someone in need. Soul care often deepens when shared outward.

These practices remind us that “caring for the soul” isn’t separate from daily life — it’s woven into soup simmering, bread rising, and laughter over dessert.

## **Closing Reflection**

Winter has a way of slowing us down. The long evenings, the quiet snow, even the gray days press us to pause. These moments can feel heavy if we only see the cold — but they can also be holy if we choose to notice the warmth God offers. A pot of soup, a loaf of bread, the sweetness of cake cooling on the counter — these are not just comforts for the body but gentle reminders of how God cares for the soul.

Just as dough needs time to rise, our hearts need time in His presence. Just as broth deepens with slow simmering, our faith matures in steady trust. And just as the family gathers around a warm table, so too God invites us to gather around His Word and His promises.

Caring for the soul doesn't require grand gestures. It's found in small prayers whispered at the sink, in laughter shared over rolls, in gratitude spoken around a humble table. These are the moments where God tends to us — and where we learn to tend to one another.

## **Devotional Questions**

1. When you think of your own "soul food," what are the spiritual practices or Scriptures that nourish you most deeply?
2. Just as bread takes patience to rise, where is God asking you to wait and trust Him right now?
3. How can your family's table — meals, desserts, even warm drinks — become a place of spiritual encouragement and rest for each person who gathers there?

4. Who outside your home might need a taste of God's comfort — perhaps through a shared meal, a baked treat, or even a listening ear?
  
5. How can you invite God into the "ordinary" of your kitchen and mealtimes this winter?

# Chapter 8: Keeping Joy Alive

## Scripture Reading

### **Philippians 4:4 (NIV)**

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

### **Nehemiah 8:10 (NLT)**

*"...Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"*

### **Psalms 16:11 (ESV)**

*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

## Devotional:

Winter has a way of stretching time. The days are shorter, the nights feel longer, and yet the weeks seem to drag. The sparkle of the holidays has passed, and what's left are cold mornings, bare trees, and a longing for spring. It's during this season that the word *joy* can feel almost foreign, like something out of reach. Yet Scripture reminds us that joy is not reserved for sunny days or easy seasons — it is something God desires us to cultivate in every circumstance.

The apostle Paul, writing from a prison cell, urged believers in Philippians 4:4: "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" He wasn't surrounded by comfort, warmth, or ease. He knew hunger, loneliness, and hardship. And still, his call was to joy. That tells us something essential: joy is not a feeling we wait for; it's a posture we choose.

## Joy as a Gift and a Discipline

One of the greatest truths about joy is that it is both a gift of the Spirit and a discipline we practice. Galatians 5:22 lists joy as a fruit of the Spirit — meaning it flows out of God's presence in us. Yet, just as with patience, kindness, or self-control, joy must be tended. It doesn't simply appear in our lives without attention. We are invited to partner with God in keeping joy alive, like a fire that needs fuel.

Think of a fire in winter. You can't build it once and then expect it to last for days. It needs to be stoked, fed, and watched over. In the same way, joy requires a kind of watchfulness — not so much striving as it is tending. Left unattended, our hearts can easily slip into discouragement, bitterness, or weariness. But when we notice the sparks of joy — a child's laugh, a verse that speaks directly to our hearts, the quiet beauty of snow falling outside the window — and fan them into flame, we are practicing the discipline of joy.

### **Joy in the Ordinary**

One of the biggest misunderstandings about joy is that it requires extraordinary events. We imagine joy only in big celebrations, grand adventures, or perfect circumstances. But joy most often comes in the ordinary — in everyday rhythms, small delights, and quiet gratitude.

The prophet Nehemiah told the people of Israel: "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10). He spoke this not when everything was easy, but when the people were rebuilding, recovering, and returning to God after exile. Joy gave them strength to keep going in the middle of hard work.

In our own lives, joy might look like singing a hymn while doing dishes, writing down three things we're grateful for before bed, or taking time to do a hobby that refreshes us. God delights in our delight. A walk outdoors, a creative project, or a night of laughter with family can all become sacred when we invite Him into it.

### **Joy in Community**

Joy is also contagious. It thrives in the presence of others. Think about how quickly laughter spreads around a dinner table or how a shared tradition can make memories that last for years. When we invite others into joy, we multiply it.

Hospitality, even in its simplest form, can become a vehicle for joy. A pot of soup shared with friends, a cup of hot cocoa offered to a neighbor, or a game night at the kitchen table can become moments that warm not only the body but also the spirit. In a culture that often prizes productivity and busyness, slowing down to enjoy each other's company becomes an act of resistance — a way of choosing joy over hurry.

### **Joy in God's Presence**

Most importantly, our deepest and most lasting joy is rooted in God Himself. Psalm 16:11 declares: "*In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" When we look for joy apart from Him, it fades quickly. But when we anchor our joy in His presence, it becomes steady, unshaken by external circumstances.

That doesn't mean we deny pain or pretend everything is fine when it isn't. It means we remember that even in pain, God is with us. His presence becomes the wellspring of joy that the world cannot take away. This is why Paul could rejoice in prison and why believers throughout history have sung hymns even in the darkest places. Joy rooted in God's presence runs deeper than sorrow, holding us steady like a river beneath frozen ground.

### **Practical Ways to Keep Joy Alive**

So how do we live this out in daily life, especially in the long stretch of winter? Here are a few practices that help:

1. **Practice Gratitude.** Keep a journal of small blessings. Even writing down three things a day can shift perspective and awaken joy.
2. **Create Beauty.** Take time for a hobby, craft, or project that brings delight. Whether it's knitting, painting, baking, or music, these acts honor the creativity God has placed in us.
3. **Share Joy.** Invite others in — through hospitality, encouragement, or simply being present with them. Joy multiplies when shared.

4. **Anchor in Scripture.** Memorize verses that remind you of God’s joy and promises. Speak them aloud when heaviness creeps in.
5. **Pray Honestly.** Bring your sorrows and discouragements to God. Joy doesn’t mean pretending, but trusting that He is with you even there.

## **A Closing Picture**

Imagine this: a family gathered on a winter evening. The wind howls outside, but inside, lamps glow warm. A simple supper is on the table, nothing fancy — soup, rolls, a plate of cookies cooling nearby. Afterward, the family lingers, telling stories, laughing, maybe even singing a song together. The youngest draws a picture; the oldest shares something from the day. There is nothing grand about it, yet joy lives in the room. Why? Because joy thrives where there is gratitude, togetherness, and God’s presence.

That’s what keeping joy alive looks like. It doesn’t require wealth, perfect circumstances, or endless energy. It requires hearts tuned to God’s goodness, hands open to His daily gifts, and a willingness to share that joy with others. So, as the winter days stretch on, may we choose to tend the fire of joy. May we notice the small sparks and fan them gently. And may we remember always that true joy is not fragile — it is rooted in the One who never changes, who is with us always, and who delights to see His children rejoice.

## **Reflection & Journaling Questions**

### **1. Choosing Joy in the Ordinary**

Think back over the past week. Where did you notice small sparks of joy — a smile, a kind word, a moment of beauty, a quiet rest? Write them down in detail. What do these “ordinary joys” reveal about God’s care for you in daily life?

## 2. **Joy as Strength**

Read Nehemiah 8:10: "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*" When have you felt joy giving you strength to keep going in a hard season? How might you lean on God's joy for strength in the challenges you face right now?

## 3. **Joy in God's Presence**

Psalms 16:11 says there is "fullness of joy" in God's presence. What helps you personally feel near to Him? Is it prayer, music, Scripture, time in nature, or something else? Reflect on how you might make more space for His presence this week.

## 4. **Joy in Community**

Think about the people who help you laugh, feel lighter, or see life with fresh eyes. How has their presence multiplied your joy? Is there someone you can reach out to this week to share a meal, a conversation, or an encouraging word?

## 5. **Joy Through Gratitude**

List 10 things — big or small — that you are grateful for right now. Then, pause to pray through each one slowly, thanking God specifically. How does gratitude shift your outlook as you pray?

**6. When Joy Feels Distant**

Are there areas of your life where joy feels hard to hold onto? Write honestly about them. Then ask God: “What are You teaching me in this season? How can I trust You to bring joy even here?”

**7. Cultivating Joyful Rhythms**

What practices or traditions could you begin (or bring back) to keep joy alive in your home? Maybe it’s a weekly family meal, a walk in nature, or reading Scripture aloud in the evenings. Write out one practical step you will try this week.

These questions give space not just for short answers, but for prayer, reflection, and journaling — encouraging the reader to linger with the theme of joy.

## Comfort Foods

When winter settles in, kitchens become the warmest room in the house. The scent of bread in the oven, soup bubbling on the stove, or a cake cooling on the counter seems to wrap the whole family in comfort. These recipes aren't about being fancy; they're about feeding people well, filling bellies and hearts alike, and making evenings memorable.

### 1. Cheeseburger Soup

This soup takes everything familiar — beef, potatoes, cheese — and pulls it together in a bowl of creamy comfort. It's one of those meals that makes you want to gather close at the table, spoons ready.

#### Ingredients

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery ribs, diced
- 3 cups chicken broth
- ¼ cup flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Optional: bacon crumbles, green onions

#### Instructions

1. Brown beef with onion and garlic; drain.
2. Add potatoes, carrots, celery, and broth; simmer until tender.
3. Whisk flour into milk; stir into soup to thicken.
4. Add cheese; stir until melted. Season and serve hot.

**Cook's Note:** This soup tastes even better with warm bread on the side. Leftovers thicken overnight, so sometimes a splash of broth the next day makes it "just right" again.

## 2. Oven-Baked Crispy Chicken (Shake-and-Bake Style)

Golden, crunchy, and easy — this chicken feels like Sunday dinner without all the fuss.

### Ingredients

- 3–4 pounds chicken pieces
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- ½ cup cornmeal
- ½ cup Parmesan
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp thyme
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- ½ cup milk or buttermilk
- 2 tbsp melted butter

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Mix breadcrumbs, cornmeal, Parmesan, and seasonings.
3. Dip chicken in milk, coat in crumb mixture.
4. Place on baking sheet, drizzle with butter.
5. Bake 35–45 minutes, until golden and cooked through.

**Cook's Note:** This is the kind of meal that pairs perfectly with mashed potatoes or roasted vegetables. The coating stays crisp, even the next day for lunchboxes.

### 3. Restaurant-Style Breadsticks

Soft, buttery, and brushed with garlic — these breadsticks could almost make a meal by themselves.

#### Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups warm water
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 2 ¼ tsp yeast
- 4 cups flour
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp salt
- 3 tbsp melted butter
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp dried parsley

#### Instructions

1. Mix yeast, sugar, and water; let foam.
2. Add flour, oil, salt; knead smooth. Rise 1 hour.
3. Shape into breadsticks; rise 20 minutes.
4. Bake at 375°F for 12–14 minutes.
5. Brush with garlic-parsley butter.

**Cook's Note:** If there are leftovers (there usually aren't), they're excellent reheated in the oven — or dipped in soup for tomorrow's lunch.

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### 4. Deluxe Ranch Potatoes

Cheesy and crisp, with just enough ranch seasoning to make them irresistible.

#### Ingredients

- 2 lbs red potatoes, cubed
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 packet ranch mix
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- ½ cup cooked bacon, crumbled
- 2 green onions, chopped

#### Instructions

1. Toss potatoes with oil and ranch mix. Roast at 400°F for 30–35 minutes.
2. Sprinkle cheese, bacon, and green onions on top before serving.

**Cook's Note:** This dish is dangerous in the best way — it often disappears straight from the pan before it ever hits the table.

## 5. Garlic-Butter Brussels Sprouts

Caramelized and buttery, these sprouts are the dish that changes minds.

### Ingredients

- 1 lb Brussels sprouts, halved
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp butter
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp honey
- Salt & pepper

### Instructions

1. Roast sprouts at 425°F with oil, salt, and pepper until golden.
2. Melt butter with garlic; stir in honey. Toss sprouts to coat.

**Cook's Note:** Even the kids who swore they'd "never eat Brussels sprouts" usually sneak seconds of these.

## 6. Ho Ho Cake

Chocolate cake, fluffy filling, and glossy frosting — nostalgic and festive all at once.

### **Cake**

- 2 cups flour
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup cocoa
- 2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- ½ cup oil
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup hot water

### **Filling**

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup marshmallow creme
- 2 cups powdered sugar
- 2–3 tbsp milk

### **Frosting**

- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup cocoa
- 3 cups powdered sugar
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tsp vanilla

### **Instructions**

1. Bake cake layers at 350°F for 30–35 minutes; cool.
2. Beat filling, spread between layers.
3. Make frosting, spread over cake.

**Cook's Note:** This cake tastes best the next day after the flavors settle, making it a perfect “make-ahead” dessert.

## 7. Chocolate Chip Cake

This bundt cake is rich but simple — the kind of cake that reminds you of a grandmother’s kitchen.

### Ingredients

- 1 box yellow cake mix
- 1 box vanilla pudding mix
- 1 cup sour cream
- 4 eggs
- ½ cup oil
- 2 cups chocolate chips

### Instructions

1. Mix everything until smooth.
2. Fold in chips.
3. Bake at 350°F for 45–50 minutes.
4. Cool, dust with powdered sugar, or drizzle glaze.

**Cook’s Note:** Serve this with hot coffee or milk — it’s a humble cake, but it never disappoints.

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## 8. Hot Lemon & Honey Tea

Not a recipe so much as a ritual — soothing, warm, and restorative.

### Ingredients

- 1 cup hot water
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice

### Instructions

1. Stir honey and lemon into hot water.
2. Sip slowly and breathe deep.

**Cook’s Note:** This is more than a drink. It’s what you make when someone feels weary, when a day’s been too long, or when the house needs a pause.

Together, these dishes weave warmth into cold days. Some are hearty enough to be a whole meal, others are simple comforts on the side, and the desserts are pure joy. They may be humble recipes, but they hold the kind of richness only home can give.

## Activities & Traditions

### For Younger Kids

1. **Soup & Story Night**

While the Cheeseburger Soup simmers, gather picture books or short stories. Kids can curl up under quilts while you read aloud — the warmth of the soup and the story blend into one memory.

2. **Breadstick Twisters**

Give little ones a small ball of breadstick dough to roll into “snakes” or twists before baking. They’ll beam with pride when their special bread shows up on the table.

### For Teens

3. **Bake & Playlist Evening**

Put the teens in charge of dessert — maybe the Ho Ho Cake or Chocolate Chip Cake. Let them choose a playlist while they bake. Music + chocolate = instant joy.

4. **Family Food Critics**

Hand out little notepads and let teens (and adults!) “review” each dish, restaurant-style. They’ll love coming up with funny ratings: “10/10, would eat these Brussels sprouts again.”

### For the Whole Family

5. **Potato Gratitude Game**

While serving the Deluxe Ranch Potatoes, go around the table and have everyone share one small thing they’re thankful for that week. Like the potatoes, it’s simple, hearty, and fills everyone up inside.

6. **Winter Nightcap Tradition**

End an evening with Hot Lemon & Honey Tea for the grown-ups, and warm vanilla milk for the kids. Dim the lights, light a candle, and let this slow ritual become a cozy winter rhythm.

## 7. **Pass-the-Pen Storytelling**

After supper, sit together and create a silly family story. One person starts with a sentence, then passes the pen (or spoken word) around the table. Pair it with a slice of cake and plenty of laughter.

**The goal isn't to add more work — it's to turn food into memory.** Whether it's floury hands twisting dough, teens laughing over frosting disasters, or a quiet tea shared before bed, these small rituals weave together the fabric of family life.

## Closing Reflection

There's something sacred about the way food draws us together. A bowl of soup, a warm roll, or a slice of cake isn't just about calories and recipes — it's about the people who gather around them. Comfort foods are reminders that God cares for both body and soul. They anchor us in seasons when life feels uncertain and give us a taste of His provision in everyday moments.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He included, "*Give us today the food we need*" (Matthew 6:11). He knew our daily hunger — both physical and spiritual. Meals like these remind us that He is faithful to provide, not only through bread on the table, but through fellowship, warmth, and joy shared in His name.

So the next time the oven hums and the table fills, pause for a moment. Notice the laughter. Notice the steam curling from a bowl. Notice the way comfort food draws hearts closer together. These are glimpses of grace, small foretastes of the heavenly banquet still to come.

## Devotional Questions

1. When you think about meals that comfort you, what memories or people come to mind? How might God be using those memories to remind you of His care?
2. Jesus called Himself the *Bread of Life*. How does that truth change the way you see ordinary meals like bread, soup, or dessert?
3. Think of a way you can use food this week to show love — maybe bringing a meal to someone, inviting a friend over, or sharing a treat. How can this simple act point to Christ's abundance?

## Chapter 9: Gratitude in the Stillness

### Scripture Reading

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)**

*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

#### **Psalm 46:10 (NIV)**

*Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*

#### **Colossians 3:15 (NIV)**

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

### Devotional

Winter has a way of slowing the world down. The snow falls, covering fields, fences, and roads with a white stillness. The nights stretch long, and the days feel hushed. For many, this season can feel heavy with quiet, almost empty. Yet, it's here in these stripped-back moments that God often does His most tender work — teaching us the language of gratitude in the stillness.

Think about it: life doesn't need noise, hustle, or abundance for us to find reasons to be thankful. In fact, it's often the **absence** of distractions that helps us see what we already have. A warm quilt pulled up at night. A loaf of bread shared at the table. The sound of laughter drifting through a small kitchen. These are simple, ordinary things — yet, through gratitude, they become treasures.

The Bible tells us, "*Give thanks in all circumstances*" (1 Thess. 5:18). That word *all* is important. It doesn't say "give thanks when life is good" or "when blessings are obvious." Gratitude is meant to flow even in the barren seasons, even when our hands feel empty. Why? Because gratitude is not about denying hardship. It's about **acknowledging God's presence in the midst of it.**

Psalm 46 reminds us: *"Be still, and know that I am God."* Stillness isn't just the absence of noise — it's an invitation. When the world outside is hushed, we're able to listen more deeply to God's whisper. Gratitude begins right there: in pausing long enough to notice His hand at work. The peace we long for is not in busy days, but in surrendered ones.

### **Gratitude as Reorientation**

Gratitude has this beautiful way of reorienting our perspective. Imagine sitting by a window on a cold winter morning. Outside, the ground is frozen, and the trees are bare. It looks lifeless. But then — a small red cardinal lands on the fence post. Suddenly, beauty breaks through. The cold hasn't disappeared, but your eyes are drawn to life, to color, to hope. That's what gratitude does. It doesn't erase challenges, but it **shifts our focus toward the gifts God is still giving.**

Colossians 3:15 ties gratitude to peace: *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... and be thankful."* Thankfulness and peace go hand in hand. The more we give thanks, the less room anxiety and discontent have to rule. Gratitude is a discipline, yes, but it's also a doorway. Through it, peace enters in.

### **Finding Gratitude in the Everyday**

Sometimes we imagine gratitude as something we'll feel naturally when life is going well. But often, gratitude is chosen before it is felt. Like kindling on a cold day, we have to place it on the fire before the warmth comes.

- When the pantry looks bare, gratitude thanks God for daily bread — even if it's just a simple meal.
- When the house feels too quiet, gratitude thanks God for rest, for silence, for His companionship.
- When family is gathered, gratitude thanks Him for voices, laughter, even the messes that come with togetherness.

Each act of gratitude is like lighting a small candle in the dark. One by one, they push back shadows until the whole room glows.

## **Gratitude as a Legacy**

One of the most powerful truths about gratitude is how it multiplies across generations. Children watch how we respond to hardship. Do we complain, or do we bless? Do we notice the small gifts, or only long for what we lack?

Imagine a family gathered around supper. The food may be simple — soup, bread, maybe an apple crisp cooling on the counter. But when thanks is offered — not just for the food, but for the hands that prepared it, for the warmth of the home, for God’s provision — it plants seeds in young hearts. They learn that gratitude is not seasonal, but daily. Not dependent on abundance, but rooted in God’s faithfulness.

## **Practical Ways to Practice Gratitude in Winter**

If gratitude doesn’t always come naturally, how can we cultivate it? Here are a few simple rhythms that fit the stillness of winter:

### **1. Gratitude Journaling**

Keep a small notebook by your bedside. Each night, write down three things you’re thankful for — even on hard days. Over time, you’ll train your eyes to notice blessings you might have overlooked.

### **2. Thankful Walks**

Bundle up and take a short walk outdoors. With each step, thank God for something you see: the crunch of snow underfoot, the clean air, the shelter waiting at home.

### **3. Family Gratitude Jar**

Keep a jar on the kitchen table. Each family member adds slips of paper with something they’re thankful for. On the last night of winter, gather and read them aloud — a reminder of God’s goodness.

### **4. Prayer of Thanks in Hardship**

Instead of asking “why me?” in difficulty, practice praying: “Thank You, Lord, that You are with me in this.” Gratitude doesn’t erase suffering, but it invites God’s peace into it.

## **A Closing Picture**

Picture this: a family gathered on a winter evening. Outside, the wind rattles the windows. Inside, the fire hums, and a lamp glows. On the table sits a simple meal. Before anyone lifts a fork, voices bow together in thanks. Not just for the food, but for God's nearness, for warmth, for the chance to share life in that very moment.

The meal will pass. The season will change. But gratitude — practiced in the stillness — will remain. It will become a habit, a lens, a legacy.

So tonight, when the house quiets, take a moment. Breathe deep. Notice the gifts right where you are. And whisper the words that open your heart wide:

*Thank You, Lord. Thank You for enough. Thank You for You.*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. When life feels quiet or still, what small blessings do you notice most easily?
2. How does practicing gratitude change your perspective during difficult seasons?
3. What are three ordinary things in your daily life right now that you can thank God for?
4. How can you model gratitude for your children, grandchildren, or others who watch how you live?
5. What new gratitude practice could you begin this winter — journaling, prayer, or a family gratitude jar?
6. How has gratitude brought peace to your heart in times when circumstances did not change?
7. In what ways do you sense God's presence more clearly when you pause to "be still"?

## Gratitude in the Stillness

The prairie was blanketed in silence. After weeks of harsh winds and snow that drove against the windows like fists, there came a morning when everything stilled. No rattling of shutters, no groan of trees bending in the gale — only the quiet weight of winter, spread wide across the land like a heavy quilt.

Mary was the first to stir. The old farmhouse creaked and settled around her as she pulled a shawl about her shoulders and slipped into her woolen socks. She tiptoed down the narrow stairs, careful not to wake the children. The air in the kitchen was sharp and cold, her breath showing faintly in the dim light. The stove had nearly gone out overnight, but she knew its rhythm well. With practiced hands, she shook the grate, coaxed the ashes into order, and fed it kindling. Soon a small flame licked upward, stretching and glowing, until the stove exhaled its familiar heat.

Mary lingered there, hands outstretched toward the warmth, letting the silence press close. It wasn't an empty quiet — not the lonely sort — but a fullness, as though the whole world was pausing together. She thought of how rare mornings like this were, when nothing demanded her attention but the crackle of fire and the soft light spilling over snowbanks outside. A verse flickered through her mind, words from the Psalms: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*"

She whispered them aloud, her voice small in the great hush. The smell of coffee soon joined the warmth, rising from the pot she set on the stove. She poured herself a cup, savoring the steam as it curled against her face. Outside, the fields stretched in endless white, fences nearly buried, and drifts rising like frozen waves. No wagon tracks, no footprints — just the quiet artistry of God's hand across the land.

It wasn't long before the children tumbled down the stairs, hair tousled, quilts trailing behind them like cloaks. Little Thomas was the first to notice. "Mama," he whispered, wide-eyed, "listen — the wind stopped."

Mary smiled. "Yes, it has. Do you hear that? That's stillness." The children hushed, standing as if the air itself might shatter if they moved too quickly. Even baby Ruth, perched on her sister Emma's hip, grew solemn, as though she too sensed something sacred.

Breakfast was simple — porridge sweetened with molasses, thick slices of bread toasted by the fire. But somehow, in the hush of the morning, the food seemed richer. Each scrape of a spoon, each clink of a cup, felt louder, more important. The children ate without their usual chatter, savoring the strange quiet like it was part of the meal.

Afterward, they bundled into coats and scarves for morning chores. The snow squeaked beneath their boots, each step leaving crisp imprints in the untouched yard. The air was sharp, but still — no wind tugging at scarves, no frost blowing into eyes. The children's laughter rang out clear as bells as they scooped handfuls of snow, tossing them skyward just to watch the powdery flurries drift lazily back to earth.

Mary stood by the barn door, a bundle of kindling in her arms, and watched them. How easily joy bloomed in the simplest places. She breathed deep, filling her lungs with the clean, pine-scented air, and thanked God silently for the stillness that made her notice it all — the glint of sunlight on snow, the sound of a rooster's call, the warmth of her own body wrapped in wool.

By midday, the family gathered back inside. Mary had beans simmering in the pot, their scent mingling with cornbread baking in the oven. The children sprawled on the braided rug, sketching with bits of chalk on their slates, their cheeks pink from the cold. Father, home early from tending the livestock, sat in his chair mending a harness strap. It was an ordinary scene, yet somehow extraordinary in its togetherness.

Mary thought again of stillness. Not just the kind outside, where the land hushed and waited, but the kind inside a heart that paused to see, to notice,

to name the gifts scattered like crumbs across the day. Gratitude, she realized, was born from stillness. Without it, blessings slipped by unnoticed — a child's laugh, the glow of firelight, the smell of fresh bread.

That evening, when the lamps were lit and the family gathered at the table, Mary offered something new. "Before we read tonight," she said, laying her hand on the big family Bible, "let's each share one thing we're thankful for today." The children blinked at her, surprised. Then Thomas grinned. "I'm thankful for the snow piles," he declared. "They're higher than me now!"

Emma laughed softly. "I'm thankful for the bread, Mama. It was warm and soft, and it made me happy." Father's eyes crinkled at the corners. He looked around at his family, cheeks glowing in the lamplight, and said simply, "I'm thankful for this home, and for each of you."

Mary swallowed the lump in her throat. When her turn came, she whispered, "I'm thankful for the stillness."

There was a moment's pause — not awkward, but weighty, as if they all understood without words. Then Father nodded, and opened the Bible to read. His voice carried steady through the quiet room, mingling with the crackle of the stove and the steady tick of the clock.

After supper, they gathered by the fire. Father told stories of his boyhood winters — of nights when his family huddled close around a single lantern, their laughter rising above the howl of the wind. He spoke of times when food was scarce, but joy was abundant, because gratitude bound them together.

The children leaned in, listening, their eyes wide. When he finished, Mary picked up her knitting, Emma hummed a hymn, and soon the whole family was singing — voices imperfect but sincere, weaving through the lamplight like threads of gold. Even baby Ruth clapped her hands, delighted by the sound.

The night stretched long and peaceful. Outside, the prairie lay hushed and still. Inside, gratitude filled every corner — spoken aloud, sung in imperfect harmony, wrapped in the warmth of family and faith.

Mary would remember that night for years. Not because of anything grand, but because of how stillness made the ordinary shine. She would recall the feel of her children's hands slipping into hers, the taste of warm bread, the quiet moment when each voice around the table named its thanks.

And in later years, when life grew noisier — with neighbors stopping by, grandchildren filling the rooms, and the pace of life quickening — she would return to that memory. She would remember how, in the deep stillness of winter, gratitude had turned their simple home into holy ground. Because in the end, it was never abundance that brought peace, but the noticing. The naming. The pausing long enough to see what was already there.

And in that noticing, Mary knew, the heart would always find joy.

## Comfort Foods

### 1. Stuffed Shells – Three Ways

There's something celebratory about a pan of stuffed shells bubbling in the oven. They're hearty, easy to assemble in big batches, and you can switch up the flavors depending on the mood. Here are three variations to keep your table interesting:

#### **Classic Beef & Ricotta with Marinara**

##### *Ingredients:*

- 20 jumbo pasta shells, cooked and drained
- 1 lb ground beef, browned with onion and garlic
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg
- 1 jar marinara sauce
- Salt, pepper, Italian seasoning to taste

##### *Directions:*

1. Mix beef, ricotta, mozzarella, Parmesan, egg, and seasonings.
2. Stuff each shell with 2 tablespoons filling.
3. Spread half the marinara in a greased 9x13 pan. Place shells on top.
4. Pour remaining sauce over, sprinkle with mozzarella.
5. Bake at 350°F for 30–35 minutes until bubbling.

## **Pizza-Stuffed Shells**

### *Ingredients:*

- 20 jumbo shells, cooked
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella
- ½ cup ricotta cheese
- 1 cup chopped pepperoni
- ½ tsp oregano
- 1½ cups pizza sauce

### *Directions:*

1. Stir ricotta, half the mozzarella, pepperoni, and oregano.
2. Fill shells, place in a baking dish with sauce on the bottom.
3. Cover with remaining sauce and cheese.
4. Bake at 350°F for 25 minutes.

## **Chicken Alfredo Shells**

### *Ingredients:*

- 20 jumbo shells, cooked
- 2 cups cooked shredded chicken
- 1 cup ricotta or cottage cheese
- 1 cup mozzarella
- 2 cups Alfredo sauce
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp dried parsley

### *Directions:*

1. Mix chicken, ricotta, mozzarella, garlic powder, parsley.
2. Stuff into shells, arrange in pan with Alfredo on bottom.
3. Pour remaining sauce over, top with mozzarella.
4. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes.

*Cook's Note:* Stuffed shells freeze beautifully. Make a pan or two ahead of time and you'll thank yourself later.

## 2. Salisbury Steak over Egg Noodles

This is the kind of meal that makes everyone sigh happily at the table. Tender patties in onion gravy served over a nest of egg noodles — cozy, filling, and timeless.

### *Ingredients:*

- 1½ lbs ground beef
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- ½ onion, finely chopped
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- Salt & pepper
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 cups beef broth
- 2 tbsp flour
- 1 onion, sliced into rings
- 12 oz egg noodles, cooked

### *Directions:*

1. Combine beef, breadcrumbs, egg, chopped onion, Worcestershire, salt, and pepper. Shape into oval patties.
2. Brown patties in butter; remove from skillet.
3. Sauté onion rings until golden. Sprinkle in flour, whisk in broth to thicken.
4. Return patties to skillet, simmer 10–15 minutes.
5. Serve over hot egg noodles.

*Cook's Note:* This one tastes even better the next day as the flavors deepen.

### 3. Angel Rolls

Soft, light, and heavenly — these rolls are perfect for any meal.

*Ingredients:*

- 1 cup warm milk
- 2¼ tsp yeast (1 packet)
- ¼ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup melted butter
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp salt
- 3½–4 cups flour

*Directions:*

1. Mix warm milk, yeast, and sugar; let sit until foamy.
2. Add butter, egg, salt, and flour. Knead until smooth.
3. Cover and let rise 1 hour.
4. Punch down, shape into 12–15 rolls, and place in greased pan.
5. Let rise 30 minutes. Bake at 375°F for 15–18 minutes.

*Cook's Note:* Brush with melted butter straight from the oven for a golden, glossy finish.

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### 4. Sheet Pan Roasted Vegetables

A colorful, simple side that makes the whole house smell inviting.

*Ingredients:*

- 2 cups carrots, sliced
- 2 cups Brussels sprouts, halved
- 2 cups potatoes, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- Salt & pepper

*Directions:*

1. Toss vegetables with oil and seasonings.
2. Spread on a sheet pan.
3. Roast at 400°F for 25–30 minutes, stirring halfway.

*Cook's Note:* Try switching veggies with what's on hand — squash, onions, or green beans work beautifully too.

## 5. Dinner Rolls with Cinnamon Butter & Honey Butter

Rolls are good on their own — but serve them with sweet butters and they become unforgettable.

### Cinnamon Butter

- ½ cup butter, softened
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Beat until creamy.

### Honey Butter

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 3 tbsp honey
- Pinch salt

Whip until smooth.

*Cook's Note:* Make both butters ahead of time, cover, and refrigerate. Bring to room temp before serving.

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## 6. Banana Pudding

Creamy layers of pudding, vanilla wafers, and fresh bananas — this dish disappears quickly wherever it's served.

*Ingredients:*

- 1 box vanilla pudding mix
- 3 cups milk
- 1 box vanilla wafers
- 3–4 bananas, sliced
- 1 container whipped topping

*Directions:*

1. Make pudding with milk, let set.
2. In dish, layer wafers, bananas, pudding.
3. Repeat layers, finishing with whipped topping.
4. Chill at least 2 hours.

*Cook's Note:* Best eaten the same day — the bananas will keep their color and freshness.

## **7. Banana Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting**

A moist, flavorful cake that tastes like the sweet cousin of banana bread.

### *Ingredients:*

- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup mashed ripe bananas
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ cup buttermilk

### **Frosting:**

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla

### *Directions:*

1. Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, bananas, vanilla.
2. Mix in flour, soda, and buttermilk.
3. Bake in greased 9x13 pan at 350°F for 35 minutes.
4. Beat frosting ingredients until smooth; spread on cooled cake.

*Cook's Note:* This cake keeps moist for days — perfect for sharing or enjoying with coffee through the week.

## Activities & Traditions

### For Younger Kids

1. **“Mini Chef Night”** – Let little ones help stuff shells! They can spoon in the filling or sprinkle cheese on top. Even if it gets a little messy, they’ll beam with pride when the pan comes out of the oven.
2. **Roll & Butter Station** – Set up a tiny “butter station” where kids get to mix cinnamon sugar into butter or drizzle honey into a bowl for honey butter. It gives them a sense of ownership and makes mealtime more fun.
3. **Banana Pudding Builders** – Layering wafers, bananas, and pudding is easy for small hands. Hand them a spoon and let them be part of dessert assembly.

### For Teens

1. **Recipe Swap Challenge** – Encourage teens to pick one recipe (like Salisbury steak or banana cake) and find a way to “make it their own” with an added twist — maybe spicy seasoning in the shells or a drizzle of caramel on the cake. It teaches creativity and confidence in the kitchen.
2. **Plating & Presentation** – Teens often love to make food look pretty. Have them be in charge of presentation — arranging roasted veggies on a platter, dusting powdered sugar over cake, or swirling whipped topping on the pudding.
3. **Music & Meal Prep** – Let teens pick the playlist while cooking together. It turns kitchen prep into a shared experience rather than just a chore.

### For Family

1. **Sunday Supper Tradition** – Choose one recipe (like stuffed shells or Salisbury steak) to be your family’s “winter Sunday supper” — a dish everyone can count on and look forward to once a week. It anchors the season with tradition.

2. **Family Gratitude Plate** – As you pass around rolls with honey and cinnamon butter, pause to share one blessing or simple joy from the week. The sweetness of the butter can serve as a reminder of the sweet moments in life.
3. **Dessert & Story Night** – Serve banana cake or pudding, then linger at the table for stories. Share family memories, read from a devotional, or even let kids make up their own silly stories. The dessert becomes part of the storytelling ritual.

These activities aren't complicated — they're woven into the act of cooking, eating, and sharing life. Just as food nourishes the body, these small traditions nourish the heart and knit family memories together.

## Closing Reflection

Winter meals have always been more than food on the table. They're the backdrop for stories told, prayers whispered, and laughter that echoes long after dishes are cleared. A simple plate of Salisbury steak over noodles or a pan of stuffed shells might look ordinary, but when shared in love, it becomes extraordinary.

Jesus often used meals to teach, to draw people close, and to remind us of God's provision. Breaking bread together is not just about nourishment — it's about belonging. It's about pausing in the midst of busy days to taste God's goodness, not only in the food before us but in the relationships around us.

As you stir, bake, or share these recipes, remember that you're weaving something eternal. Your kitchen becomes a place where warmth lingers, where gratitude is practiced, and where God's presence is welcomed at the table. These moments don't have to be elaborate; they just need to be intentional. And in that intention, families are strengthened and faith is nurtured.

## Devotional Questions

1. **God's Provision** – When you think about “daily bread” (Matthew 6:11), how has God provided for you in this season — physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
2. **Table of Fellowship** – Who in your life might need an invitation to share a meal — not just for the food, but for the fellowship?
3. **Family Faith Moments** – How can you use mealtimes (even ordinary ones) as opportunities to talk about faith, gratitude, and God's goodness?

4. **Hospitality in Small Things** – Sometimes a simple dessert or fresh rolls with butter can speak love louder than words. What “small things” can you offer this week to bring comfort and joy to others?
  
5. **Carrying Joy Forward** – How can your family create a tradition around food (like Sunday suppers, dessert nights, or gratitude rounds) that will carry faith and joy into the next generation?

# Chapter 10: Preparing for Spring

## Scripture Reading

### **Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)**

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."*

### **Isaiah 43:19 (NLT)**

*"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."*

### **Galatians 6:9 (ESV)**

*"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."*

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## Devotional:

The long months of winter teach us patience. They ask us to wait through gray skies, cold mornings, and days when the world seems hushed under a blanket of snow. But even in the quiet, God is working. Beneath the frozen ground, roots are deepening. Under bare trees, buds are forming, though we cannot see them. In the stillness, the promise of new life is already being written.

So it is in our own lives. We all walk through winters — seasons of waiting, weariness, or even wilderness. Times when we long for change, for warmth, for fresh growth but cannot yet see it. In those moments, it is easy to feel restless or discouraged. Yet Scripture reminds us: *"For everything there is a season"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1). God has appointed times for sowing, for waiting, and for reaping. Our part is not to force the season but to walk faithfully in the one He has given.

Isaiah 43:19 assures us that God is always at work, doing something new even when it looks barren around us. Just as the ground prepares to break forth with blossoms when the snow melts, God prepares our hearts through the winters of life so that when spring comes, we are ready to grow.

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His new beginnings often arrive quietly — a softened heart, a door opening, a renewed strength to keep going.

Galatians 6:9 speaks into this truth: *"Do not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."* The weariness of winter can tempt us to stop planting seeds of prayer, kindness, or faithfulness. But every seed matters. Every act of goodness, no matter how small, is a step of trust that spring is on the way. The harvest may not come quickly, but it is promised.

As we prepare for spring in practical ways — tidying our homes, planting seeds in garden beds, airing out what has grown stuffy — let's also prepare our hearts. Ask: What has God been teaching me in this winter season? What do I need to lay down before Him so that He can bring new life? What seeds of faith, gratitude, or service can I plant now, trusting that He will bring the growth?

Winter is not wasted. It is the quiet season that makes spring so astonishing. And in the same way, the winters of our souls are not wasted either. God uses them to strengthen us, deepen our trust, and prepare us for the joy of new beginnings.

So, as the days slowly lengthen and light returns, may we hold onto hope. Spring will come. Growth will come. God's promises will bloom in due season — and when they do, we will see that His timing has been perfect all along.

## **Reflection & Discussion Questions**

### **1. Looking Back:**

What lessons did God teach you in your own "winter seasons"? How did those quiet or difficult times prepare you for new growth?

### **2. Seeds of Faith:**

What are some "seeds" you can plant now — habits, prayers, or acts of service — that will bear fruit in the coming months?

**3. Trusting God's Timing:**

Do you find it easy or hard to trust God's timing in your life? How can Galatians 6:9 encourage you when you grow weary of waiting?

**4. Making Room for Renewal:**

As spring approaches, what areas of your home, heart, or schedule could you clear out to make space for new beginnings?

**5. Hope in Transition:**

How does remembering that God is "doing something new" (Isaiah 43:19) give you hope for the season ahead?

## The Turning of Seasons

The snow on the prairie was thinning, but only just. Patches of earth began to peek through in the south-facing slopes where the sun lingered longest, dark against the pale crust of old snow. The wind, though still sharp, carried with it a faint change — not yet warm, but softer somehow, less biting. It was as though the land itself knew that winter's long hold was loosening, though no one dared say it aloud for fear of stirring another blizzard.

Inside the farmhouse, Mary stood at the kitchen window, her hands wrapped around a warm mug, watching the drip-drip-drip of melting icicles outside. She had grown up here, on this same land, watching the seasons turn, but every year this moment felt like a gift — when hope pressed through even before the ground had.

The children noticed it too. Emma had pulled her chair close to the window with her sewing basket, working on small stitches as the sunlight pooled brighter across the table. Thomas and little Ruth had abandoned their heavy boots by the stove, daring to run outside with only lighter shoes, stomping through slush just to feel freer than they had in months. They would come back in soaked, of course, cheeks pink, eyes shining, and Mary would scold them gently while draping their socks and mittens near the stove to dry.

Father was out in the barn, tending to the animals as always. The work never ceased with the changing of seasons, but there was a different rhythm now. Where winter chores had been about endurance — keeping water from freezing, keeping hay accessible, keeping the animals safe against bitter winds — now the work hinted at preparation. Fences would need mending. The plow would need checking. Seeds, still in their sacks, waited for the ground to soften.

"Spring will be here before we know it," Father said that evening as he came in, stamping mud and slush from his boots. "The days are stretching longer. We'll be turning soil soon."

The children listened wide-eyed. Even though they had lived through seasons before, each year it felt new — the promise of planting, the idea that something would grow again from the cold ground.

That night, after supper, Mary pulled a box down from the shelf. Inside were packets of seeds saved from the year before — beans, peas, lettuce, corn. She spread them on the table like a deck of cards, and the family leaned close to look. “We’ll plant these soon enough,” she said with a smile. “But for now, let’s think about what else we’d like in the garden this year. Maybe sunflowers again?”

Thomas piped up. “And pumpkins! Big ones, like last year.” Emma, more thoughtful, suggested herbs. “I’d like to help with drying them this time, Mama. We used them so much this winter.”

Father leaned back in his chair, nodding. “It’s good to plan ahead. What we plant in spring is what will carry us through another winter.”

The weeks that followed moved slowly, but the change was steady. Snow melted into rivulets that ran along the fence lines, making little streams for Ruth to float sticks in. The barnyard grew muddy, and boots squelched deep, but no one minded much — mud was a sure sign of spring on its way.

One Saturday, the family gathered for the first big “spring house” task — opening the windows, just for a while, to let fresh air sweep through the rooms. It was still chilly, and the breeze carried the smell of damp earth and thawing fields, but it made the whole house feel alive again. Quilts were shaken out, rugs beaten against the fence, floors scrubbed. There was a lightness in everyone’s step, as though sweeping out the house made room for joy to enter too.

Mary found herself humming as she worked, a hymn she didn’t even realize had been in her heart: *Great is Thy Faithfulness*.

The words carried her as she scrubbed and polished, the truth of the old song echoing in the fresh air that filled the home.

When the house was set to rights again, Father declared it was time to check the tools. He pulled out the plow from its resting place and ran his hands along the handles. "Needs a bit of tightening here," he murmured. Thomas followed him eagerly, eyes wide as Father explained how the soil would be turned, how seeds needed just the right depth and distance.

Mary stood nearby with Emma, sorting through jars in the pantry. Some shelves stood empty now, the last jars of peaches and beans nearly gone. "But that's as it should be," Mary told Emma. "We ate what we stored. And soon, God willing, we'll fill these shelves again."

Emma traced her finger over the neat labels — peaches, green beans, tomatoes, apple butter. "I like seeing them full," she admitted softly.

"So do I," Mary said, giving her daughter's shoulder a gentle squeeze. "But emptiness is part of the rhythm too. It makes us ready to receive the next harvest."

On Sunday afternoon, the family took a walk down the lane, something they had not done much all winter. The sun was stronger that day, bright enough that coats felt almost too heavy. Birds had begun to return, their songs tentative but hopeful. The children ran ahead, splashing in puddles, pointing at buds barely visible on the trees.

"It's like the whole world is waking up," Emma said, falling into step beside her mother.

Mary smiled. "That's exactly what it is."

They stopped by the creek, where the ice was breaking into jagged chunks, the water rushing free beneath. Father bent down, scooped a bit of water into his hand, and let it run through his fingers. "Cold yet," he said with a grin, "but moving again. Just like us."

Inside the home, evening routines shifted too. Where winter nights had been filled with firelight and long hours of reading or sewing, spring evenings were busier. Chores stretched later with the lingering daylight. Supper dishes were often washed with the windows cracked, letting in fresh breezes. The children went to bed a little later, for it was harder to convince them that the day was done while the sky still glowed pink outside.

But even with the busyness, the family did not neglect their times of gathering. After supper one evening, Father opened the Bible and read aloud from Galatians: "*Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.*" The words seemed written just for this time of waiting, of working and hoping.

Mary looked around the table at her children, their faces lit with lamplight, their hands folded. She thought of all the seasons they had walked through together — the hard winters, the warm summers, the times of plenty and the lean years. Each one had carried its own lessons, its own gifts. And here they were again, standing on the edge of something new.

"Spring doesn't come all at once," Father said gently after the reading. "It comes little by little. The same is true for us. God's work in us grows slow and steady, like a seed underground. We can't see it yet, but it's there."

Emma nodded thoughtfully, Thomas tapped his fingers on the table, and Ruth yawned wide, already half-asleep. Mary's heart swelled with gratitude — not for perfection, but for the simple gift of this moment, of this family gathered in faith and hope.

By the time Easter drew near, the prairie had changed again. Grass poked green through the brown earth. Wildflowers hinted at color along the roadside. The air smelled different now, less of damp earth and more of new life.

On Easter morning, the family dressed in their best clothes, patched though they might be, and walked to church. The little white building stood bright against the sky, and inside, the voices of neighbors and friends rose in song: *Up from the grave He arose!*

Mary felt tears prick her eyes as she sang. The message of resurrection seemed to pulse through the land itself — new life breaking through where there had been cold and silence. The children sang too, their voices high and earnest, and Father's deep voice rumbled steady beside her.

After the service, families lingered outside, shaking hands, exchanging news, talking of planting and weather. Children darted around, hunting for eggs in the grass, laughing in the sunlight.

When they returned home, Mary set out a meal she had prepared the day before: roast chicken, scalloped potatoes, fresh rolls, and the first rhubarb pie of the season. The table was bright with flowers the children had gathered on their walk home, tucked into a simple jar. They bowed their heads, gave thanks, and ate with joy.

As the afternoon waned, Father took his fiddle from its case and played while the children danced across the wooden floor. Mary sat back, hands folded in her lap, watching. Outside, the world was shifting, opening. Inside, their hearts did the same.

Spring had come.

But more than that, hope had come alive again — hope that carried them through the long winters, through the waiting, and into the promise of what lay ahead. And in that moment, Mary knew: preparing for spring wasn't just about planting fields or scrubbing floors. It was about letting God prepare hearts too — to trust, to hope, to grow, to believe that new life always follows the cold.

The fire in the stove burned low, no longer the desperate blaze of winter, but a gentle warmth against the evening. The children drifted to sleep one by one, quilts pulled high, while the last light of day faded into the horizon.

Mary lingered by the window one last time, watching the land she loved, feeling the quiet turning of seasons. She whispered a prayer — for strength in the work ahead, for joy in the small things, for faith that carried them steady. And as she turned back to her home, her family, and her life, she smiled.

Spring was here. And so was God's promise of new beginnings.

## Comfort Foods

When the last weeks of winter stretch long, and yet you begin to feel that tug of spring, the kitchen becomes the bridge between the two. These dishes are sturdy enough to hold you through the lingering chill, but with little hints of freshness and brightness that whisper of what's to come. Some feel like winter itself — creamy, rich, and hearty. Others carry a spark of springtime with fresh greens or citrus notes. Together, they remind us that comfort is never bound to one season, but carries us faithfully from one into the next.

### Swedish Meatballs with Cream Gravy

There's something cozy and deeply satisfying about a plate of Swedish meatballs. Tender, well-seasoned, and nestled in a velvety cream gravy, they're the kind of meal that feels at home in both winter and spring. On a snowy night, they warm you through; on a chilly March evening, they give you strength to greet tomorrow with hope.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1/2 lb ground pork
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 small onion, grated or finely minced
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1/4 tsp nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp allspice

#### For the gravy:

- 4 tbsp butter
- 1/4 cup flour
- 3 cups beef broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- Salt & pepper to taste

#### Directions:

1. Mix breadcrumbs with milk and let them soften. Add meats, onion, egg, and spices. Mix gently and shape into small balls.
2. Brown in a skillet, then set aside.

3. In the same pan, melt butter, whisk in flour, and cook until golden. Slowly whisk in broth, then cream and Worcestershire.
  4. Season well, return meatballs to the pan, and simmer 10–12 minutes until cooked through.
  5. Serve hot over noodles or mashed potatoes.
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## **Creamy Grits**

A steaming bowl of creamy grits feels like the definition of comfort — simple, filling, and endlessly adaptable. They're soft and buttery, with just enough richness to satisfy. Best of all, they're a blank canvas: serve them as they are, or let them cradle roasted vegetables or a savory stew.

### **Ingredients:**

- 4 cups water (or half chicken broth, half water)
- 1 cup stone-ground grits
- 1 tsp salt
- 4 tbsp butter
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (optional)
- 1/2 cup cream or whole milk
- Black pepper

### **Directions:**

1. Bring water to a boil with salt.
2. Slowly whisk in grits, reduce to a simmer, and cook 20–25 minutes, stirring often.
3. When tender, stir in butter, cream, and cheese if desired.
4. Spoon into bowls and finish with a sprinkle of black pepper.

## **Italian Wedding Soup**

Few dishes feel so balanced between cozy and refreshing as Italian Wedding Soup. Tiny meatballs bobbing in golden broth, tender pasta, and bright greens — it's light enough to remind you that spring is on the way, but hearty enough to keep the chill away.

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder
- Salt & pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 cup small pasta (like acini di pepe)
- 2 cups fresh spinach or escarole, chopped
- Parmesan for serving

### **Directions:**

1. Mix meat, breadcrumbs, egg, and seasonings; roll into small meatballs.
2. Brown lightly in olive oil.
3. In the same pot, sauté onion, carrot, and celery until softened.
4. Pour in broth, add meatballs, and simmer 15 minutes.
5. Add pasta and cook until tender, then stir in greens just until wilted.
6. Serve with Parmesan.

## **Kielbasa and Sauerkraut (Stovetop Skillet)**

This dish is humble, hearty, and just right for late-winter days. The tang of sauerkraut, the smokiness of sausage, and the sweetness of sautéed onions come together into one skillet that's both simple and deeply flavorful.

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 lb kielbasa, sliced
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 onion, sliced thin
- 3 cups sauerkraut, drained
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1 tsp caraway seeds (optional)
- Black pepper

### **Directions:**

1. Melt butter in skillet, sauté onions until soft.
2. Add kielbasa, browning lightly.
3. Stir in sauerkraut, broth, and caraway.
4. Simmer 20 minutes until flavors meld.
5. Serve hot with bread or potatoes.

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## **Oven-Roasted Asparagus with Lemon Butter**

The first signs of spring often come to the table before they appear in the fields. Asparagus — bright green, tender, and fresh — is like edible sunshine. Paired with lemon butter, it's a simple side that turns any meal into something hopeful.

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 bunch fresh asparagus, trimmed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Salt & pepper
- 2 tbsp butter, melted
- Juice of half a lemon

### **Directions:**

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Toss asparagus with oil, salt, and pepper. Spread on sheet pan.
3. Roast 12–15 minutes until tender-crisp.
4. Drizzle with melted butter and lemon juice before serving.

## Snowball Cookies

These little cookies look like tiny snowdrifts — fitting for late winter, when snow still lingers on the ground. They melt in your mouth and bring a touch of sweetness to tea time or dessert.

### Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar (plus more for rolling)
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 1/4 cups flour
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans or walnuts

### Directions:

1. Beat butter and sugar until creamy.
2. Stir in vanilla, flour, salt, and nuts.
3. Roll into small balls and bake at 350°F for 12–15 minutes.
4. Roll in powdered sugar while warm, then again when cool.

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## Maple Walnut Fudge

The late-winter ritual of maple sugaring has always been tied to hope — the first real sign of the season's change. This fudge captures that flavor, marrying maple sweetness with crunchy walnuts for a candy that feels celebratory.

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 1/2 cups chopped walnuts

### Directions:

1. Combine sugars, cream, butter, and syrup in saucepan. Cook to 235°F (soft-ball stage).
2. Remove from heat, add vanilla, and beat until thick.
3. Stir in walnuts, pour into buttered pan, and cool before cutting.

## Butterscotch Pudding Parfaits

There's something joyful about layered desserts. These parfaits are smooth, creamy, and just sweet enough, with the playful crunch of crushed cookies between the layers. They're a gentle reminder that dessert can feel both comforting and light.

### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 3 cups milk
- 3 egg yolks, beaten
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 tsp vanilla
- Whipped cream
- Crushed cookies

### Directions:

1. Whisk sugar, cornstarch, and salt with milk in saucepan. Cook until thick.
2. Temper egg yolks, return to pan, and cook 2–3 minutes more.
3. Stir in butter and vanilla. Cool slightly.
4. Layer pudding, whipped cream, and crushed cookies in glasses. Chill before serving.

Each of these dishes carries its own story of comfort. Together, they hold winter close while opening the door to spring. Hearty meatballs, savory kielbasa, and creamy grits keep the chill away; asparagus, lemon, maple, and parfaits brighten the path forward. That's the beauty of food at season's end — it anchors us in the present while preparing us for what's to come.

## **Activities & Traditions**

### **Preparing for Spring**

As the last snow begins to melt and the first signs of green appear, our homes shift too. The rhythms of winter give way to little preparations for new life — both indoors and out. Just as we tuck away heavy coats and bring out lighter sweaters, we can also mark this season with simple traditions that help us savor the change. Here are a few ideas for weaving joy and preparation into these in-between days.

#### **1. Pantry Refresh & Restock**

Winter pantries tend to be heavy with flour, beans, and canned goods. As you prepare for spring, take a day to sort, use up what's left, and restock with lighter staples. Involve the family: kids can help line jars neatly, teens can plan a "pantry meal" from what's left, and you'll all feel the satisfaction of order.

#### **2. Seed Starting at the Kitchen Table**

Whether you have a garden plot, a few pots on the porch, or simply a sunny windowsill, starting seeds indoors is a hopeful ritual. Tomatoes, herbs, lettuces — even a child's little paper cup with dirt and a bean seed can bring delight as green shoots appear. This tradition ties the family to the coming season in the most tangible way.

#### **3. Spring Cleaning as Celebration**

It doesn't have to feel like drudgery. Put on music, open the windows (even if it's just for a few minutes of brisk air), and make it a family event. Assign each person a "corner of care" — one small area to refresh. Light a candle or simmer lemon peels and cinnamon on the stove when you're done, filling the house with brightness.

#### **4. An “Almost Spring” Picnic**

Even if it’s still chilly, bundle up and eat a simple meal outdoors — soup in thermoses, rolls wrapped in cloth, and cookies or fudge tucked in a tin. Sitting on a porch step or spreading a quilt on the backyard grass reminds everyone that warmer days aren’t far away. Kids especially love this little break from routine.

#### **5. Gratitude Walk**

Choose an afternoon and walk the neighborhood, field, or woods. Notice the details — a bird call, melting ice, the smell of damp earth. Each person can share one thing they’re grateful for on the walk. It’s a grounding tradition that helps shift hearts from winter’s endurance to spring’s hope.

#### **6. Sweet Gift Baskets**

Gather some of the season’s treats — snowball cookies, maple fudge, or jars of apple butter still tucked in the pantry. Wrap them simply and deliver to a neighbor, teacher, or friend. It’s a way of saying, “We’re making it through together” — a bridge between seasons shared with others.

These traditions don’t require perfection or big budgets. They’re about marking the shift — noticing the light that lasts a little longer each evening, hearing the drip of snowmelt, and preparing the home (and the heart) for what’s ahead. Preparing for spring is less about rushing and more about savoring — letting gratitude and hope take root just as surely as the seeds you plant.

## Closing Thoughts

As the seasons turn, we're reminded that life itself is always moving — from cold to warmth, from stillness to growth, from waiting to new beginnings. Winter has its gifts: the comfort of food, the glow of family gathered close, the time to rest and reflect. But spring calls us forward. It invites us to open our windows, plant new seeds, and let hope take deeper root.

Preparing for spring isn't just about scrubbing floors or planting gardens — it's about opening our hearts to renewal. Just as the earth softens and makes way for new growth, so too can we make room in our lives for gratitude, joy, and the quiet work of God that often begins unseen.

As you carry these recipes, stories, and traditions into your own home, may they remind you that comfort isn't bound to one season. It lingers in memory, carries forward in tradition, and always makes a way for what's ahead.

## Reflection Questions

- 1. What part of winter do you most want to carry with you into spring?**  
(A tradition, a rhythm, or even a favorite food that nourishes your heart.)
- 2. How can you prepare your home — physically and spiritually — for a new season?**  
(Think of small changes that welcome renewal.)
- 3. What seeds of hope or gratitude would you like to plant in this season of your life?**  
(These may be literal seeds, like herbs in a pot, or spiritual ones, like Scripture or prayer.)

4. **Where do you sense God nudging you to let go of “winter” in your soul, and embrace “spring”?**  
(Are there places of heaviness, habit, or weariness He’s asking you to release?)
  
5. **Who might you bless with the comfort you’ve received this winter?**  
(A neighbor, friend, or even a family member who needs encouragement.)

Preparing for spring is really about learning to live awake — to see beauty in transition, to welcome both endings and beginnings, and to remember that in every season, God is faithful.

## Epilogue

### Winter at Home: A Closing Blessing

Winter has a way of drawing us in. Into our homes, into quiet rhythms, and often, into deeper awareness of God's steady presence. Through these pages we've lingered in the stillness, tasted comfort at the table, and found joy in small traditions that make the season feel less heavy and more holy.

But now, as the final chapter closes and spring draws near, I want to leave you with this thought: *the lessons of winter don't end when the snow melts*. Rest, gratitude, family, and faith are gifts for every season. Winter simply slows us down long enough to notice them.

Maybe you found yourself in these pages — curled beneath quilts, stirring soups, or practicing gratitude when days felt long. Maybe you tried a new recipe or added a small tradition with your family. My hope is that whatever pieces you carried with you, they remind you of this: God's faithfulness is steady in every season. He is the warmth in your winter, the hope in your spring, the joy in your summer, and the peace in your autumn.

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### A Prayer for the Seasons Ahead

Lord,  
Thank You for the gift of winter —  
for quiet nights, warm kitchens, and the lessons hidden in stillness.  
Thank You for family gathered close,  
for laughter, for daily bread, and for joy that lingers.  
As we step into new seasons,  
keep our hearts tender and our eyes open.  
Help us plant seeds of gratitude and hope,  
and trust Your timing for growth.  
Bless our homes with peace, our tables with fellowship,  
and our lives with rhythms that draw us nearer to You.  
Amen.

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## **A Benediction for Your Home**

May your winters be filled with rest and renewal.  
May your springs awaken hope and new beginnings.  
May your summers overflow with joy and abundance.  
May your autumns be rich with gratitude and peace.  
And through every season, may you know the nearness of  
God —  
the One who never changes, even as the world turns.  
So as you close this book,  
may you carry with you not just recipes or traditions,  
but a way of seeing —  
a way of living awake to the beauty around you,  
and the faithfulness of God in every season.