

Spiritual Seasons of Life



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If you've been reading some of my other teachings, by now you'll realise that one of my constant themes is "spiritual maturity", both for the individual believer, and the Body of Christ itself.

It used to be said that when the tribulation of life or even the Last Day's tribulation comes, the "anointing" will carry us through. Well, I suggest that it's actually the inner mature character of the saints that will keep and guard us through life. Of course, our faith, our trust in Christ, and Christ Himself is the major portion of how we're kept safe, but closely connected to that is how far we've come in the maturing of our spiritual life – the inner character of the heart, if you like.

So, when reflecting on the Spiritual Seasons of God, we need to first lay a foundation. That foundation will be found in the natural seasons, for it's a principle that the Natural Realm speaks to us of the Spiritual Realm. This is why the seven Feasts of YHWH (Leviticus 23:4-43) are associated with agricultural seasons. And of course the Feasts in the "natural" speak of their fulfilment in the "spiritual" through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the natural flow of seasons there's clearly a pattern; Summer, Autumn (Fall), Winter, and Spring. This never changes except perhaps for the shortening or lengthening of some seasons occasionally. Even the seven days of the week are patterned for us, with the last day becoming a day of rest, the Sabbath (our "Saturday").

It is important to note that only the seventh day of the Biblical week was given a name; the other six days are simply known as the "first day", the "second day", etc. (Genesis 1:5 / 2:3 and Exodus 20:11). This highlights the importance and sanctity of that day.

So patterns become vital in our understanding of spiritual issues. We recall that Moses wrote down the pattern for the building of the Tabernacle Tent (Exodus 25:8-9), just as David handed onto his son Solomon, a pattern for the building of the first Temple (1 Chronicles 28:11-12).

As we read Scripture it's obvious that patterns occur over and over, especially in the Old Testament and finally surfacing in the New:

"These things became examples [Lit: a shape, pattern] for us, so that we may not lust after evil, even as those indeed lusted." 1 Corinthians 10:6

"...who serve the pattern of and shadow of heavenly things, even as Moses was divinely warned, being about to make the tabernacle: For He says, See that you make all things according to the pattern being shown to you in the mount..." Hebrews 8:5

According to Leviticus the Tabernacle pattern was recorded in exacting detail. Why? Because the Lord desired that we should understand patterns and thereby have insight into His mind and purpose. Even the placing of the Tabernacle furniture shows a fascinating pattern, as does the layout of Solomon's Temple. Great truths can be found hidden in patterns, if only we had eyes to see and hearts willing to search.

Now, back to the natural seasons. Scripture indicates that the four seasons of the year began after the universal flood of Noah's time. Prior to the flood there was a fairly constant temperature together with a gentle vapour that daily watered the earth, there being no rainfall at that time (Genesis 2:4-6). From creation until the flood there was neither rain nor seasons as we now know them.

It was after the flood that the arrangement of seasons was established unceasingly, just as God declared to Noah. This regularity is what's called "the Principle of Uniformity" by scientists. However, this was instituted (and promised) by God to be a regulated sequence of Seasons, together with a fixed cycle of Day and Night periods (Genesis 8:22) - a pattern ordered for quite specific purposes by God Himself.

Though these seasonal patterns are now part of what is called "natural" it was in fact ordered by "the Divine". Here we have the beginnings of the great conflict between the theory of evolution and the Biblical account of a divine creation.

Scripture tells us that seasonal patterns were instituted as far back as Creation itself:

"And God said, Let luminaries be in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years." Genesis 1:14

"Seasons" here doesn't mean the four seasons we identify now, because as we've seen, that didn't happen until after the Flood. In the above text it refers to the generality of order in relation to the sun and moon, and probably stars.

"He appointed the moon for seasons; and the sun knows its going down."
Psalm 104:19

There are obviously seasons and periods that are controlled by God through the influence of celestial bodies like the sun, moon and stars. Consider the monthly menstrual cycle of a woman, the daily tides of the oceans, the effect of a full moon on fishing, animal breeding times, bird migrations, etc. All these, and much more, are governed by God's providential ruling over "the luminaries" to affect the daily business of life on earth.

Interestingly these are directly associated with "signs" (Genesis 1:14). The word refers to that which is a "signal, beacon, monument, prodigy, evidence, mark, miracle, or token" (Strongs H226). The Hebrew is based on an associated word meaning "to come" (H255), indicating that something or someone is yet to come, of which the luminaries give assent. Interesting, "someone" is to come!

As we've seen, the seasons belong to the Lord God of the universe. They are entirely and completely in the hands of our God. Yes, man may influence them due to his bad environmental practices, but generally the four seasons that God has set, still continue on. Likewise too are His specially appointed divine seasons; these having a particular unique fulfilment in God's grand purpose.

The Lord's will is continually being done on the earth by those whom He has called out to do this task. He moves sovereignly over all things in heaven and earth; it is He who appoints times and it is He who fulfils them. It is also He who reveals such things to His faithful ones even before they are brought to pass.

We who live temporarily in this earth realm have our lives dictated by the natural seasons. In most places there are the normal four seasons we have come to know so well, but in other places there are only two discernible seasonal changes, such as in the extreme polar caps, and the tropics.

Nevertheless our familiarity with the four seasons causes us to do certain activities at certain times entirely dependent on whether it's hot or cold outside. In regard to plant life, we know when it's time to plant bulbs, sow seed, when to fertilise, etc. And when we do plant the seed, we do so understanding there's a certain period of waiting required, and we are content to allow the seed to follow its set course of hibernation awaiting the moment of bursting forth.

This may be so in the natural realm, but it shouldn't necessarily be so in the spiritual. While indeed there are seasons of "waiting" and seasons of "reflection" in the spiritual, it's wise to constantly be vigilant and alert in these quiet seasons. In the natural we are content and even tolerant of these cold seasons, but it should not necessarily be so during the spiritually barren seasons.

In the Word we are exhorted to remain active during all the seasons that come our way. As hard as it is during the "barren" seasons we should not allow ourselves to become barren within our spirit-man, and simply wait until a better season comes upon us. No, in the spiritual realm we are to still seek for any opportunity to sow a seed into someone's life, or to cultivate something in our own life, and to seek for a reaping where possible.

So many of us have allowed a cold spiritual season to dictate to our inner-man and we've become inactive, almost waiting for better times with a negativity that robs us. Our thought is, "Times will get better, I just have to hold on and get through this season of lifelessness".

This however will not do for those who desire to move into spiritual maturity. There's a need for us to bring our inner man to attention, to take stock, to decide that we *will* draw from such barren seasons all the beneficial lessons that we possibly can. It's important that we don't waste our sorrows but learn to discern what's going on with our emotions. I like how Francis Frangipane puts it:

"There will be times when, to obey God's will, we must fight our very instincts for survival. Plan on it. There will be seasons when you will hurt terribly or be deeply troubled inside. Perhaps even facing severe depression, yet to fulfil God's will, you cannot excuse yourself because of heart sickness. In utter defiance of your own feelings, you will have to say, "Yes" to God. It is at this juncture, beloved, that true spiritual progress is being made."

Once more it has to do with times and seasons, and particular our response to them. Most of us **react** to situations rather than **respond**. A mature person in the Lord is one who has learnt to respond to issues and not be dictated to *by* the issues.

All believers will experience these barren seasons but let us not think that Satan has sent them. It may feel like he has, and obviously he'll take advantage of us during such times, but it is God, our God, who ordains both the natural and spiritual seasons. Paul discovered this precious truth:

"But I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..." Philippians 1:12

Don't blame every season of discontent on Satan. In God's mysterious yet wonderful purpose, there are seasons of "The Opposites", and God would have us realise this early on in our walk with Him.

Think for a moment: perhaps you're a person who enjoys the warmth of the sun, bright blue skies, and the abundance of leafy trees that give shade. If you're such a person, as you soak up the sun and gently smile at the clear blue sky, you mind may well say "God is good to me - I so enjoy this kind of perfect weather". But what happens when the cold and damp of winter arrives, and the rain makes

you feel miserable, the biting wind truly does give you a shudder, and the grey monotonous skies seem heavy above you. Does your mind then say, "Satan has sent this miserable weather, and I don't like it one bit".

Of course not. We accept that at one period it's simply time for the sun and birds, the blue sky and lovely evenings, just as we accept that the season has changed and now the cold has come and the days are dark and sombre. We don't think that God has sent one and Satan the other. That would be ludicrous! So why do so many people think that God only sends the good times and Satan sends the bad? If we accept that in the natural seasons there are opposites, why don't we accept it in the spiritual seasons?

Any believer who has walked the walk for some time will soon know that the Christian life isn't easy. It has many struggles, many valleys and peaks, many triumphs and certainly many sorrows. But all the opposites are in fact part of God's purpose, and it is He who "**works all things together for good...**" (Romans 8:28). God allows the difficult seasons to come for our maturing, not to burden us down and cause unnecessary anxiety.

Part of this maturing depends on adjusting to the different spiritual seasons we find ourselves in. It's a requirement of spiritual maturity that we both discern what's going on, learn from it, and seek God's counsel about it. We are to use our time wisely, appropriately, and to ever be ready in response to the season we find ourselves in. Note what Jesus the Pattern Son has to say about this:

"...My time is not yet here, but your time is always ready." John 7:6

One of the great characteristics of maturity is how we use our time, and how we respond to the seasons of life, whether good or difficult. We are apt to be more content with the changing seasons in the natural than we are in the change of spiritual seasons. Dear saints, this must be addressed if we are to advance in spiritual maturity.

In the natural seasons we are more or less assured at the approximate length of a particular season, but this is not so in the spiritual. While we know very well that summer will last approximately three to four months, we can never be sure how long a spiritual season might last. This is where our faith is really tested because we simply do not know how long we're in a particular season for, especially if it's a "barren winter" season, the so-called "dark night of the soul" experience.

So what's needed is an understanding of how to personally deal with each spiritual season. Usually most of us are fairly good at giving advice to someone else who is going through a rough patch, but if we're honest we often don't apply that same advice to our own situation.

Actually I find that giving "advice" is generally unhelpful; the more accurate Biblical type of help is "counsel" based firmly on the Word. Note that I didn't say "counselling" but "counsel".

"For I did not keep back from declaring to you all the counsel of God." Act 20:27

Here the word "counsel" means "consolation, deliberation" and also (God's) "will or purpose." In context Paul is declaring the purpose of God's plan of salvation, but the basic meaning of the word is still helpful for us to consider here. Only once in the New Testament does the word mean "decision", once it means "motives", four times it means "plan", but five times it means "purpose".

So to give somebody Biblical counsel means to declare to them God's purpose and plan. It is to this purpose that their problem should be anchored. Once we can link our problems with God's declared purpose, then we see clearly to move forward. However, if we focus on the problem without putting it into the context of the divine purpose, we're likely to go around in circles.

So Biblical counsel is better than human advice. Giving human advice is not always helpful because it is based on man's experience, often devoid of the truth of God's grander purposes. "Counsel" has behind it the idea of reaching an end through a practical solution. It is through consulting the principles in the Word of God (often with the assistance of a mature believer) that enables us to deliberate the issues and arrive at a beneficial answer to our situation.

That is why “counsel” is usually found as the object of a verb, expressing the idea “to take” or “to give”. The idea behind Biblical counsel is not to try and solve the problem of somebody who might be going through a dry spiritual season; rather it’s the “giving” of Biblical counsel about how to respond when we do find ourselves in such seasons. Then, it is up to us individually to “take” the counsel, based on eternal principles, and to implement them in our own lives. By doing this our seemingly barren spiritual season is put into a greater context and we see things as they truly are - in light of God’s greater purpose.

Ideally it would help if we have been through a similar experience to the person we’re trying to help; but if that’s not the case, then we can always safely revert to what the Word counsels about situations. Naturally, we’re not going to find something in the Word that fits every situation of modern life, but you can be sure that the principles are there. So I encourage people to look for principles in the Word that will help them through, not ready-made answers to the problems of modern life as if the Bible is a kind of “Self-Help Dictionary of 1,001 Instant Answers”.

The “giving” of Biblically accurate principles based firmly on the Word of God, followed through by the “taking-in” of this counsel, will always ensure a way ahead. It also has the by-product of not making the counselor the focus, because all the counselor has really done is to fathom out the riches of the Word and offered them as an answer. We see this kind of counsel throughout Proverbs, and a study of this book will greatly enlighten us.

One of the most pressing needs of the Church today is the adjusting of the mind to God’s purposes. We who live in the western world are beset by an attitude that screams at us, “Be an individual”, “Do your own thing”, “Don’t let anyone judge you”, “Stick up for your rights”.

This is not a Biblical mentality; it is human wisdom and it is fraught with danger because it actually sets us against God. There is an urgent need for the Church to take stock, re-visit the Word of God, be willing to adjust to it, and move on in obedience. By doing so we will have a much better chance of discerning the various seasons that come our way, both good and bad. For example, it is hopeless to think we can navigate the treacherous reefs of a barren spiritual season if we’re not firmly on-board the vessel the Lord has provided for us.

Noah in the ark is a good encouragement for us. He did not have all knowledge about what the flood was going to accomplish. He obeyed, he trusted in his God, and he waited out the difficult season he was in. His place in the whole scenario was to trust and obey; God would see to the rest. It was only after the flood that Noah began to understand the season he was in, and even then, it was still step-by-step.

So it is for us now. Many of the spiritual seasons we find ourselves in bewilder us. We get confused, we cry out for God to intervene, and at times He seems an awfully long way off. The season we find ourselves in, tend to make us focus on self. Have you ever noticed that? When things come against us and the normally comfortable walk of faith is suddenly pushed aside by some tragedy, problem or illness - our immediate reaction is to focus on self. “Why is this happening to ME?” “What have I done to deserve this?” “Doesn’t God care about ME?” “Look at MY situation?”

This is really the same as when we physically hurt ourselves. Cut your finger with a knife, knock your knee on the tow bar of your car, sprain an ankle. Where does your thought fly? To where the pain is. That is where our attention goes to, to the problem area; we focus on the spot where the pain is. This is quite normal and there is nothing wrong in it. But it does serve as a lesson for us when we are injured in our soul life, when a domestic problem arises, or someone at Church betrays you, or a loved-one is diagnosed with cancer, etc.

Our minds fly to the problem; we focus on the pain, and it’s not very long before we’re thinking of all the possible consequences that will soon follow. Financial worries race through the mind; emotional stress builds; how will I cope; my whole life has taken a king hit; life is suddenly in a turmoil; how will I get through the months and years ahead?

What throws us off balance is not just the situation and its consequences, but all that surrounds the problem. This weighs us down as much, or even more so, than the actual issue itself. There is a tendency within us to leap from the situation we find ourselves in, to the foreboding consequences that will accompany it.

I recall one difficult patch we as a family endured. All the above things plagued our minds and we were in a very dark season indeed, with great stress, grief, and a heavy sense of despair. We were very much like David when he said:

“I am bent down, I am bowed down exceedingly; I go mourning all the day. My loins are filled with a burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am exceedingly benumbed and crushed. I howl from the groaning of my heart. My Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my power forsakes me! And the light of my eyes is no longer with me.” Psalm 38:6-10

This was a dark season for all of us. When that particular season had passed us by, I knew we had to learn from it, as hard as it was. But He was there, with us in the season, not forsaking us, but speaking hope. God was eliciting a response from us by speaking to us of hope, faithfulness, and stability.

All of these very things came to pass out of that season, and it has brought a different level of maturity to us. It has also made me become much more aware of the hurt and pain of others, and I am able to identify with people more closely in similar situations. Bless His name! Indeed it is very true:

“...that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel...” Philippians 1:12

I share these things, not to draw undue attention to myself, but to encourage you that whatever seasons might befall us, He is totally and utterly aware of them, and fully aware of our feelings, emotions and pain during such times. Sometimes we can only truly learn something by going through it. I say this, not to ignore the reality of the pain and suffering, but to highlight the reality of being transformed by it.

Such episodes in a believer's life add to the experience and knowledge of understanding seasons and times. I've heard it said that African Christians look into another believer's eyes searching for the Cross. In other words, they want to know if you have been with Christ **“in the fellowship of His sufferings”** (Philippians 3:10). Whether the saying is true or not, it certainly makes the point.

The point is that grace is always available in any season; it is just that in some seasons it's more apparent than in others. The work of grace upon one's soul can be seen to act in two distinct ways. One particular work of the Holy Spirit on the soul is to break down all our self-centeredness. Another work is to exalt Christ as “above all”, particularly over our emotional life. The result of both is for the full salvation of one's soul, and the glorification of God.

The Lord will use all, and any season, to bring this about. Our seeming difficulty is discerning what the seasons mean, what is to be learnt, and how to stand firm while we undergo the season of change or trial. It is usually too late to learn the lesson if we haven't prepared for such times beforehand. This is why dying daily unto one's soul-life (Luke 9:23) is vital.

It is important to take advantage of the good seasons and beneficial times as they come to us. Use such occasions for the benefit of your soul. Go into the secret place (Psalm 91:1 and Matthew 6:6) and there learn of the Father's ways. By regularly doing this in the good seasons, we prepare ourselves for any difficult season that may come. It is then far easier to stand during the times of uncertainty. Strange as it may seem the best lessons are learnt in seasons of affliction, and we do need to prepare for them.

It's in those seasons when temptation, distress, trouble and humiliation abound, that we learn the wonderful secrets of heavenly wisdom. Why? Because during such times we discover our own weakness, the folly of trusting in the flesh, as well as the sustaining power and love of a faithful Father.

I realise only too well that sprouting Bible texts doesn't always bring comfort and relief in seasons of perplexity, whether you're saying them to yourself, or someone else says them to you. Our soul can so easily want to give up, to walk away, to blame God, and yes, even to accuse Him of letting such things happen. But He has called us, and He remains faithful to us. So, we find ourselves holding on when there seems to be little to hold onto. We almost want to throw it all away, yet strangely we keep coming back. The Bible might seem to be veiled to us, empty of power even; but still we look at that Book on the table and feel guilty because we know that in it are the truths that will fill the void.

We want so much to come out of this dry, barren, deathly season, but we know so frustratingly well, that we cannot hasten its time. Slowly we begin to understand the eternal truth that **"the times and seasons the Father has set by His own authority"** can be counted on (Acts 1:7). And when He sends the season of favour, nothing but nothing, can hold it back!

The seasons of one's life, like the seasons of creation, will continue under the awesome oversight of our Father in heaven. Take heart, we are being taught by Him and sooner or later all whom He has called will know the full measure of that special season when He sends **"rain and fruitful seasons to us from heaven, filling our hearts with food and gladness."** Acts 14:17

Grace in Jesus to you as we come more and more into spiritual maturity.

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