
The Writer's Inkhorn

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Continuing Reflections on the Word for Your Personal Growth in Christ

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Discerning the Times in Our Own Lives



wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-17

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

What profit hath he that works in that wherein he labors? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made everything beautiful in His time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God.

I know that, whatsoever God does, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God does it, that men should fear before Him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been and God requires that which is past. And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the

Do you know what time it is? I mean, do you *really* know? Asking someone the time is a very common and acceptable thing to do in our culture, but I don't think many people give much thought to discerning the time on a deeper level than just clock hours. It is time to discern the time in our own lives.

As I read through the text that is included here in this issue for your convenience, and as I began to meditate upon it, I discovered that this text has some far-reaching implications for looking at our lives, particularly in the natural. Sometimes I think we become so accustomed to looking at the Word for spiritual insights that we forget the two are connected, and so we live far beneath our privilege as believers because we simply do not understand that the Word brings instruction in righteousness *and* daily living.

The book of Ecclesiastes is considered part of the wisdom literature of Solomon, but is more eclectic than the book of Proverbs, meaning there is some poetry, there are some proverbs, and there are some longer narrative passages. This book of Ecclesiastes rounds out the wisdom of Proverbs in the sense that the writer has lived long enough to learn some things, and shares them with his readers as he reflects back over his life. Namely, this: life can be full of disappointments and unexplainable mysteries, but for all of the unanswered questions, it is still best to fear God, keep His commandments, and thus enjoy the life that God has given you. Even when things do not work out as we have desired, we do not give up our faith in God. Rather, we recognize, as this text says, that "*to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.*"

Let's just take a look at a sampling of some of the things mentioned in this text, so that we can make some connections to the larger picture –

which I *really* believe is about keeping life in perspective. When we start to discern the times in our own lives, we need to look more closely at various **aspects** of our lives, examining them against the Word of God and what we know as God's will for us – which is *"...to prosper and be in health, even as our souls prosper."* Our God is a God of balance and perspective; He always operates that way, and we need to do likewise.

The first thing mentioned in our text: *"A time to be born and a time to die;"* This struck me as being relevant to family life and planning. Many times we plan for and put more energy into births and deaths than the whole of life in between. As it pertains to births, Ladies, how many times have you gone to baby showers where there were just far too many clothes and toys and things bought for a small infant, and not one check or savings bond or penny given or put aside for the child's education? In between that baby's birth and death, there is a time for a life to be lived.

Here is another simple but practical thing to consider, as it relates to death. How many times have we lost a loved one and had to buy things in which to bury them? What sense does it make to **not** make sure they have decent things to wear while they live, and buy all new garments to be buried in when they die? Does that make good sense? I used to do my mother's laundry, even after I had moved and was living on my own. From time to time I would come across a piece of "well-worn" clothing and would tell her, "Mom, it's time to throw this item away." Eventually, it caught on, and when my mother died suddenly, she had **so** many *nice* things, many of them still brand new, until I had things to give to both of her sisters and to a friend of hers. Her sisters could just choose what they wanted. Isn't it time to learn to put our emphases in the right places and on the right things **while we live**, and not just when people are born or when they die?

A time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. Interestingly, in these last several years of my marriage, my husband has taken up gardening and I have begun to call him just this year, "my urban farmer." He has planted collard greens, tomatoes, okra, cabbages, and green peppers. His sister Margaret, who is a

master gardener, has shared tips with him about when are appropriate times to plant. For example, one should not plant seeds in the ground until the nightly temperature stabilizes and does not fall below 55°. However, when doing raised-bed gardening, your planting can be done sooner, according to one source.



Gardening seasons are dependent on the temperature of the soil. Because the soil in your raised garden will warm up quicker than the ground underneath your lawn, you are able to plant your garden earlier than if you waited for the ground to thaw. (Mark F., posted on 4/20/16)

I think many readers would be surprised at the number of people who now have gardens in the city, from just growing something in five-gallon buckets, to small plots in their back yards, to much larger areas. But it is no wonder, when we consider the number of food-related illnesses we now suffer as a direct result of the things we are ingesting into our bodies from chemicals and pesticides to who knows whatever else. So, for practical and health reasons, this is probably a good time to think about *"a time to plant."*

And from a spiritual perspective, Scripture has **many** analogies about planting and pruning from which we can glean instruction for daily living:

- We are to be like trees planted by the rivers of water (deep-rooted, stable, grounded in truth)
- Jesus is the true Vine; we are branches...
- If we are not fruitful, we will be taken away...
- One plants, another waters, but it is God Who gives the increase

Take some time to look up other references.

As you read through this text again and have time to meditate on the word, ask the Lord to help you apply it to discerning the times in your own life. There are at least seven areas we should be examining on a regular basis. They are spiritual, familial, professional, financial, social, physical, and mental or intellectual. You can start by asking yourself a series of questions. Socially, what is it time for in your life? Physically, what is it time for? Spiritually, what is it time for? Intellectually, what is it time for? In your home life and in your living conditions, what is it time for? In your family, and in your relationships with your friends, what is it time for? Career-wise, what is it time for? Financially, what is it time for? In your individual ministries, what is it time for? Looking at the gifts and talents that God has entrusted into your hands, what is it time for?

Young people, if you have some things you want to accomplish in life, some things you'd like to be, some places you'd like to see, then what is it time for, educationally? I'm not leaving you out of this discussion. You will not wake up one day and automatically be a doctor simply because that was what you were dreaming about. It'll never happen. When I was very young, I used to dream often about finding a lot of money, and when I would awaken, I'd *still* be broke every *time*.

If you want to accomplish some things in this life before you close your eyes in final rest, then there are some decisions that need to be made, followed up by some actions to be taken. You can start by breaking things down into manageable pieces that can be looked at, contemplated over, prayed about, researched, etc. Take a lesson from the great Creator-God and learn to break things down into specific goals and objectives. Have you ever really looked at the creation story in light of God's goal-setting, planning, scheduling, and evaluation? Even God had specific plans for each of the six days of creation. Look at it. His overall goal was creation of heaven and earth. Day one's objectives were light, day and night. Then follows a delineation of the things that were accomplished that day, and finally an evaluation of the first day's work: it was good. And that pattern follows for each of the successive days.

God had a plan for creation, and if that was how God operated, what makes us think we can accomplish anything of substance in our lives without some planning and goal-setting. Try to set some goals in each of those seven areas to begin, since they represent a pretty good cross-section to show balance in our lives. Other areas can be added later in their time. *This* is the time to take control of the life that God has given you. Realize that you are to always be praying that the will of God be done, but you are also to be planning within the divine will as He unfolds it to you through His Spirit.

What you will come to understand is that some wonderful things happen to you as a person as you begin to take control of your life by setting and reaching your goals. The attitudes, knowledge, skills, and habits you develop are of infinite value as you continue on in life. With goals, you can more fully realize your maximum potential, you can use your mind and talents fully, you have more purpose and direction in life, you make better decisions, you become more organized and effective, you do more for yourself *and* others, you have greater confidence and self-worth, you feel more fulfilled, you become more enthusiastic and motivated, and, yes, you even accomplish some uncommon projects.

God has so much more in store for us than we even realize. Remember Paul says in Ephesians 3 that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us? Well, I've got news for you. Not only is He able to do, but God is *willing* to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, simply by our working in concert with Him, and His will for us as it is revealed to us by the His Spirit, which *is* the power that is at work in us.

There is a little used portion of Scripture that comes just after the recording of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As Jesus drew near to the city, He wept over it, saying: *"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes ... because you did not know the time of your visitation."* Jesus knew that even as some were hailing Him, the majority of the people were rejecting Him. They did not

recognize Who He was and what He had come to do for them.

Seasons come and go in our lives. They do not always remain the same. How sad it is to miss the time of your visitation from the Lord. Yes, He can restore years that we have missed, opportunities that passed us by when we were not ready the first time around, but it does not always happen that way. When we allow the Holy Spirit to have full sway and do His work in our life and in our being, in both the spiritual and the natural, then we are more able to be productive in each of the seasons of our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the teacher and reveals truth, and not just spiritual truth, but *all* truth. Whatever we need to know, the Holy Spirit imparts the wisdom of God to us. Why continue to live beneath your privilege by missing the time of your visitation? The price that Jesus paid for our salvation also brought some other benefits with it, but only as we become more adept at discerning the times in our lives, listening to the voice of God, and moving in sync with His timing.

Do you remember the story of Moses' call and the objections he raised to God? Once God and Moses got past all the objections, the very thing that God came back to was this: in Exodus 4:17, God told Moses again, "*And you are to take this rod that is in your hand to do signs.*" Why do we think it is okay for us to complain or make excuses about what talents God has or has not given us? How dare we regard what God has put in our hands as nothing? How dare we undervalue what we *have*, and overvalue what we *don't* have? It is *not* a mark of humility to deny the presence of a gift we have received from God. Are you taking in what I am saying to you here? As God asked Moses, so I'm asking you, "What is in *your* hand? What is *your* rod? What gifts or talents has God given *you*?" You see, God wants you to know that *whatever* He has put in your hands, He is willing to work with to accomplish *His* purpose.

God does not judge our worth by our external circumstances. It is not the sophistication or size of our gifts and talents that are the critical factors. It is, rather, our willingness to yield them to God, Who can multiply their effectiveness for our

benefit, and for *His* service. What has God been telling you? Isn't it time for you to discern the times in your life?

Your effectiveness in kingdom work is in direct proportion to the order that is in your own life. Inasmuch as God sent Moses, and He sent Jesus, He also wants to send you and me, but the Great Commission started right at home, in Jerusalem, and with the kinfolk in Samaria, before God calls us to be His ambassadors to the uttermost parts of the world. There is work to do right where you are, and this is the season for it.

God has uniquely equipped each of us for our part in His overall plan. Know that God sees each of us as we can be, and He speaks to our destiny, rather than our history. It is my prayer that you will learn to hear His voice, and heed His call to be available for whatever He has for you to do. Ask God for the wisdom to discern the times, first in your own life, and then in these last days as we prepare for His coming. *Nothing else* matters more.

I will end this discussion with a related note that I posted just over two weeks ago:

What time is it in *your* life? What is this *season*? Are you reading your life carefully enough to discern that? If you are not, you may be asking questions of yourself that you can really answer already if given some serious thought. Every season in life that God grants us has its own beauty. Be thankful and enjoy it for *whatever* it has to offer, and for whatever you are to *learn* from it, and while in it, as *this* season surely prepares you for the next one that is coming if you are paying close attention.

Your Teacher and Sister,
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Contact me. May I assist you? I am available for speaking and workshops and I am dedicated to adding value to the lives of others. Reach me at 773.735.8713 or mary.webster@trnty.edu

