

"Come, let us return to the Lord.
For He has torn us, but He will heal us;
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.
He will revive us after two days;
He will raise us up on the third day,
That we may live before Him.
So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.
His going forth is as certain as the dawn;
And He will come to us like the rain,
Like the spring rain watering the earth."

Hosea 6:1-3



Slowing Down

Painting by Paul Gabriel

AS JULY LAZILY EXTENDS ITSELF INTO AUGUST, everything around us seems to slow down.

Most of the birds have had their families, and have moved on—or at least are enjoying a break from satisfying the gaping, voracious appetites of their young. The deer have had their fawns, and are now patiently conducting them through an exploration of their new lives. The turtles in the pond do little more than sun themselves, and even the excitable, hardworking squirrels and chipmunks have slowed their pace.

Many of the growing things have shifted into neutral as well. After the vigorous growth of the spring, the trees and bushes now look much the same day after day. And, while changes are taking place, the garden will appear much the same tomorrow as it does today. The potatoes are established and relinquishing their fruit, the tomatoes have filled their supporting cages, and the

vine crops have laid out their overwhelming growth to cover the soil.

Even the lawn has slowed its growth. Rain received in the spring quickly excites luxuriant growth, and the grass requires mowing every few days. But now, during the lazy middle days of summer, even when there is rain the grass takes its sweet time to reach mowing height.

During these lazy middle days of the season the afternoon heat is searing, the horizon lost in summer haze. As the cicadas rev their nostalgic hum, and the unforgiving sun drills down, the pace of both man and nature slows, and ennui becomes a more familiar companion.



Reflections
by the Pond

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For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
"I dwell on a high and holy place,
And also with the contrite and lowly of
spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite."

Isaiah 57:15

In the springtime of our relationship with the Lord, there is easily excited, luxuriant growth. We look forward to time spent with Him. We open His word with eager anticipation, hungry for His counsel. Our prayers are simple, clear, direct, and passionate. There is a powerful, almost overwhelming desire to love Him, to serve Him—to be with Him.

But as the springtime of our devotion moves into summer, and summer begins its slow descent into autumn, the pace of the relationship slows. Our early fervor diminishes. It becomes easier to go days without seeking the Lord's counsel, and the obligations of this present age re-exert their claim on our time and affections. We search harder for the words to our prayers, and our ears become less attuned to His voice. Our passion fades.

In nautical parlance it's called the "doldrums"—a word that has been borrowed to describe that flat, sluggish, unproductive feeling that most humans experience from time to time. In Spiritual terms it can describe a

period of listless separation from God—a feeling of "He no longer cares, so why should I," or that God has simply become irrelevant for the moment. Our mind becomes sluggish and dispirited, our thoughts rooted to the soil, rather than soaring with the eagle.

Just as in the surrounding natural world, in the summer of our relationship with God, it is easy to think that all growth has stopped—that because the rains have diminished and the heat has caused us to stop looking up, we must settle for the monotonous, stultified plateau on which we find ourselves.

But if we think of that relationship in terms of a lifetime, instead of a solitary year, we come to realize that while there will indeed be the slower seasons of summer and autumn, there just as surely will follow the bracing rush of winter and the glorious new growth of the spring.

We do not spend just one year with the Lord; we spend a lifetime—indeed, an eternity. And while we surely will experience seasons in which we become sluggish and lazy, to accept that condition as the inevitable norm is to deny that springtime will occur again.

For it certainly will.

The Spirit of God does not sleep, but is active and inventive throughout the year of seasons and the lifetime of years. When our devotion flags, His does not. When we become hypnotized by the incessant drone of our own ennui, He does not. When we are distracted by smaller things, the Holy Spirit remains focused on the essential. All the time our senses are numbed by the heat-soaked vapors of a tired world, the Spirit living within us remains attentive, sharp, and wholly devoted to the growth of our relationship with the Father and Son.

*Thou who givest of Thy gladness
Till the cup runs o'er—
Cup whereof the pilgrim weary
Drinks to thirst no more—
Not a-nigh me, but within me
Is Thy joy divine;
Thou, O Lord, hast made Thy dwelling
In this heart of mine.*

*Need I that a law should bind me
Captive unto Thee?
Captive is my heart, rejoicing
Never to be free.
Ever with me, glorious, awful,
Tender, passing sweet,
One upon whose heart I rest me,
Worship at His Feet.*

*With me, wheresoe'er I wander,
That great Presence goes,
That unutterable gladness,
Undisturbed repose.
Everywhere the blessed stillness
Of His Holy Place—
Stillness of the love that worships
Dumb before His Face.*

*To Thy house, O God my Father,
Thy lost child is come;
Led by wandering lights no longer,
I have found my home.
Over moor and fen I tracked them
Through the midnight blast,
But to find the Light eternal
In my heart at last.*

Gerhard Tersteegen

