



A Time to Pause

AUTUMN LINGERS UPON THE BREAST like pleasant memories from a good friend's visit, like the fresh-scrubbed oxygen that a thunderstorm leaves behind. It is a time of change, when every morning brings new colors, new smells, and an altered vista. It is a time when even as the pace of change quickens in the natural world, the pace of man slows. It is the season of meandering strolls through multihued glens, through the melancholy fluttering of leaves falling to the ground.

Autumn is a time of introspection, when the musk of drying foliage and loam slow the mind to consider days past, the highs and lows of a life. Every season has its own beauty, but autumn, like spring, brings with it a mood. If spring exults in new life, autumn examines the old; if spring is the anticipation of tomorrow, autumn is a meditation on yesterday.

And as the warm nostalgia of autumn fades into the steely clarity of winter, our thoughts turn inward. So much of the Christian life is *process*; so much of it is just paying attention. What good is our stumbling, if we never look back to understand why we tripped? What good is a victory, if it doesn't leave us more humble? What good is life itself, if tomorrow doesn't find us better than we were the day before?

The rich umbers and golds of autumn are now fading. In their place remains only the gray and black framework of the naked timber, a tangled clutter, branches interwoven and whipping against each other in the gathering north wind.

Not that long ago, as I felled trees and sectioned their wood for the fireplaces, I worked in shirtsleeves, sweating in the dry, warm air. The sun was still bright, the grass still green, the clothing of the trees still blazed rainbow colors. Today the sky is a leaden gray, and it will not be long before we are visited by the season's first snowfall.

In the magnificent untidiness of the Christian walk, it is necessary to pause as the leaves of autumn transition to the cold

of winter, to examine the grace just spent. God leads us through our days expecting us to pay attention: to listen, to observe, to learn. He expects us to grow *toward*, not away from Him. He expects us to stop every once in a while and listen for His voice.

Change is all about us as autumn transitions to winter, and in the midst of change we must slow our own pace to listen to the voice of God, and the lessons He waits to teach us.

God's nature never stands still; it is always moving, pressing into the next day. Today's tree will be taller tomorrow—or it will be fallen, lying dead and rotting in last year's leaves. Today's grass, luxuriously pliant and green, will tomorrow be brittle and parched, brown and sharp to the touch. The fawn that accompanies her mother today will next year be taller and perhaps on her own.

The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
And cold and heat,
And summer and winter,
And day and night
Shall not cease."

Genesis 8:21-22

Time never stops. Season passes into season, change inevitably comes. As I gaze out my window, beyond the pond, into the now-naked trees of the woods—I feel a sense of urgency. What have I done for the Lord today? The days continue to tick by; what am I doing that will yield eternal results? Am I using well the time God has given me?

The person I pass on the street in town today, will tomorrow be older—or dead.

What have I done today so that his tomorrow will be something more than just his being one day older? If he is dead, will I have done something to affect his eternity?

All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 The Message

Will God's kingdom be better or larger tomorrow, because of something I've done today? Have I filled up each day using the gifts God has graciously entrusted to me? Have I used them for Him, or have I squandered them in the service of an earth-bound dream?

Some young plants and trees still need to be watered in the autumn. They ask for deep-rooted sustenance to carry them through the dormancy of winter. As I fill the old galvanized bucket with water and carry it to the base of the small tree I notice a few drops leaking from the bottom edge, trailing a glistening path of drips through the drying leaves that carpet the grass.

And I realize that when we are born, God gives each of us a bucketful of days. He fills our bucket to overflowing, pouring into it, as well, all His goodness and blessings, gifts and opportunities. As time passes, the days drip out, one by one, until, at our earthly end, the bucket is dry. Our days have run out. Our gifts and opportunities have reached their end. No more.

Each of us begins with a bucketful of days. But only God knows how many days the bucket holds.