



Slowing down

“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

AS SUMMER LAZILY EXTENDS ITSELF THROUGH JULY AND INTO AUGUST, everything around us seems to slow down. Most of the birds have had their families, and have either 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, 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 regular 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.

THE DRONE OF OUR OWN ENNUI

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 pas-



sionate. 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.

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 summers 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 does. 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.

DOLDRUMS

During the Vietnam War, I was one of about a thousand sailors aboard a cruiser running a circuitous route around the Gulf of Tonkin. Being a teenager from the land-locked state of Iowa, I was a stranger to the rolling, flip-flopping acrobatics that even a large warship can experience on the high seas.

A military ship is not a luxury ocean liner filled with paying customers. The government does not spend a lot of money on stabilizers meant to ease digestion during high seas. The green-gilled swabby is expected to get used to eating from a tray that is trying desperately to fly across the room, and to learn how to walk with a curious rolling gait through passageways that are tipping and rolling from side to side.

But the seas are not always in such violent turmoil. There were infrequent days when the vast ocean was strangely calm, its surface utterly flat. With the top of the liquid depths as smooth and still as a linoleum floor, it felt as if the massive warship was nothing more than a toy boat sitting in a vast, empty room. The eerie calm was as unnerving as the silence of a vast desert roaring in the ears. Had we been on a sailing ship, we would have been helpless to move an inch. It was, in its barren vastness, quite claustrophobic.

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.

When we are there—and, because we are flesh, we all will be—the remedy is nearer than we think. We have at our disposal that most gracious Wind to fill our lethargic sails. We have living within, no matter the season, the harbinger and creator of eternal spring: the Holy Spirit. The scent of new growth and the fresh exhilaration of that sweet season lies always within our own grasp. dsj

*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