

Life's Seasons

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Autumn, not unlike its companion seasons, brings with it both excitement and apprehension that comes with change. This reminds me of when my children were young, when we would invite the neighborhood over for a “going back to school/end of summer” campfire. Everyone was eager for school to start, yet melancholy still lingered in the crisp fall air.

In Ecclesiastes, the author beautifully summarizes everything that we as humans will experience: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to work and a time to rest, a time to cry or mourn, and a time to laugh or rejoice, a time to say hello, and a time to say goodbye... Life is what it is, and we contend with all aspects of life when it is time. That is how God designed our lives, all lives.

Knowing this, what makes it so difficult to accept life on its terms and with its many transitions?

Perhaps it is not the events or changes alone that are so difficult to navigate, but rather the reorientation and self-definition that comes with change. I suspect most people are not comfortable in those neutral zones in which the previous life/role/identity lingers, and the new self has not been incorporated. For instance, I frequently hear about how difficult it is for parents to send their offspring off to kindergarten or college for the first time. Internally, as parents, we grieve, question, adjust, prepare, and examine, as we struggle with the uncertainty that comes with our children's milestones.

For others, life changes may remind them of their mortality and the constant march of time. Fear and anxiety may surface as we question our purpose, and the meaning of life. This human condition and pursuit is described in Ecclesiastes. The author describes man's relentless, unsuccessful search for happiness as “vanity” and “chasing after wind”.

In Ecclesiastes 2:24, the author offers a solution. He notes that there is *Nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink and find enjoyment in their toil. This also is from God, for apart from God, who can eat or who can have enjoyment?* The author seems to be suggesting that a way to cope with everyday life may be to participate fully in the present moment. What might this look like? It could be mindfulness of what is happening today...the joys, burdens, gifts, connections, or growth that you are experiencing. It may be acceptance of whatever “time” it is. It might mean finding value in our experiences, and not judging them as “good” or “bad.”

Rituals, or rites of passage, can also help people process and accept changes. For example, each season brings its customs. Fall rituals might include celebrating nature's harvest, baking and cooking, or decorating with corn stalks, leaves, and pumpkins. Rituals also communicate "this is who we are" and can make life changes less stressful and more meaningful. How can you honor or celebrate whatever transition you are experiencing?

Perhaps the best suggestion to cope with life's struggles and changes is to turn to your faith. We are designed to be in relationship with God, and apart from Him, there can be no true enjoyment in our everyday activities. God put a "sense of eternity" in your heart, not to be dissatisfied with this life, and long for something better, but to be aware that there is more to come. My wish for you is to be content in the knowledge that God is in control, and that His plans for you are long term.