

To Everything There Is a Season – 10/22/23

Do you know that our bodies and minds require stress to change? That's just a weird thought....we *require* stress! Yuck! But "stress" does not inherently have to be a bad thing. There are good and bad stressors, happy and sad, expected or planned stressors, and the unexpected ones, sometimes we call them "surprises".

There are fun sources of stress. Planning a vacation. Getting a new pet.

There are stressors that aren't so easy. A new job. A new house. Being the new person in the neighborhood.

There are stressors that aren't pleasant, too. The death of a loved one. An argument with a friend. Recovery after an illness.

The thing about stressors is that each one causes us to change in some way. It may be intentional, for example, the stress of formal education causes our brains to be re-wired a bit so that the neurons are making new connections – you learn something new and your brain creates a pathway. Or, it might be something completely unexpected, like smacking your thumb with a hammer the first time --- you learn pretty quickly that you don't like that type of "change", right? Either way, it was something new and different that causes you to adjust what you're doing.

The other thing about change? God can and will use it in our life to His glory. The Bible tells us "there is a time for everything a season for every activity under heaven". He'll take those things that cause us stress and use them to show us His will. And others can see Him, His will, His plan, through our change. They will see what God causes to happen, how it affects us, and how He could impact them.

The scripture reading was a bit long, I know...But! Saul had a pretty big stressor on the road to Damascus, didn't he?

He'd been going along. Being, basically, a terrorist to the early Christians. He was happily living his life, his way.

Then—**BAM!!**—God had a different role for him. His life was changed. Over night.

He didn't get to ease into the idea. He didn't kick it around with his buddies, in fact I'm pretty sure that his friends were at least as blindsided (pun intended!) as he was by this change. By this life event.

Imagine you've lived your life thinking, planning to be a bounty hunter. You've spent countless hours training. You've honed your mind and body to tolerate the rigors of tracking fugitives. You're on the road, literally, to the capture your biggest paycheck ever. You know where they are. You have documentation saying it's okay for you to bring them in.

Then, whammo!

You suddenly have a change of heart. You no longer want to apprehend fugitives.

Instead, you're going to raise butterflies. You'll buy a plot of land. Grow the plants butterflies like and need to flourish. You are now a butterfly farmer.

Think your friends and neighbors are going to support you right away? Or do you think they may feel the need to have you checked out at the local psyche facility? What about the fugitives you were just tracking down? Do you think they'll accept that you're no longer coming after them? Might they be a bit suspicious?? This change is more than a 180 degree change. It looks more like invasion of the body snatchers!

I imagine that's a little bit of what Saul's comrades and family felt about his conversion. He was struck blind in the middle of the road by forces they couldn't comprehend. Three days later, still blind, he talks to Ananais – someone he probably would have imprisoned four days ago! If I had been Ananais, I think I'd have taken a bit more convincing before I'd have made this visit! – and suddenly he's telling everyone that "Jesus is the son of God". **WHAT???** Talk about whiplash!

God changed him. Completely. Heart. Mind. Even his name, how others knew him.

Change isn't typically an easy thing. It usually makes us at least a little uncomfortable.

The scripture tells us this wasn't an easy change for Saul. The people who thought he was still out to get him tried to kill him, a couple of times. The Jews weren't happy with him either because he was teaching the Jesus was the son of God.

However, God has also promised to help us to deal with change just like provided Saul/Paul with the tools to get through the rough times. For example:

Lamentations 3:21-23 "Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day."

His mercies are fresh every morning! He is unfailing, and He loves us unendingly! Even as we change He does not.

Or...

Psalm 119:105 "Your word is lamp for my feet and a light for my path."

In the midst of our changing lives, God continues to guide us. He shows us the way so long as we are willing to keep our eyes on Him!

Phillipians 4:13 "For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."

I chose this translation on purpose. I'm used to reading "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." In fact, I'm so used to hearing it that way that it's easy to put the emphasis on the wrong parts. Sometimes I hear the "I can do all things" part MUCH louder than the "through Christ"

phrase. This is from the New Living Translation. For me, it helps to re-orient my focus from me, back to Christ – the source of all the strength I need to make it through the thing we call life!

One more reminder from scripture.

Romans 8:28-30 “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And he gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory.”

God already knows how the story ends. (I mean spoiler alert, so do we since he gave us an advanced copy of the script!) He knows what we’re going through. He knows what changes he’s affecting in our lives. He knows how the stress can affect us. And he’s already got it under control! Another version of these verses says it this way: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son....and those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified (how God moves us/changes us from a state of sin to a state of grace); those he justified, he also glorified (changed to reflect the image of Christ).”

So, we know change is part of life. Change is not always easy, nor is it always what we expect it to be. We know that God promises to be with it through all of it. And, we know he already has a plan for us, including the twists and turns that we perceive with each change.

And, we know there’s something we need to do in order to receive this support. Right. You do know what we need to do to get his help through all of this? What is our responsibility? Or, said another way, what’s the catch?

Listen up. Just hear me out. There’s three things we have to do.....

One. Confess our sins. Recognize and admit that we are sinners. Each one of us. We might be “good people”, but we all fall short of the mark. The goal is perfection – personified by Christ. And not one of us is perfect. So, we pray –aka, talk to God – and confess exactly that. Our shortcomings. Our mistakes.

Two. We believe. That he is the lord God almighty. That he sent his only Son to die on the cross, not to condemn us, but to show his immovable unchanging love for us.

And, three. We accept him. As lord and savior of our lives. We accept his love. We accept his will.

That’s it. That’s all we have to do in order to have God’s unfailing support.

No magic words. No number of “good deeds”. No self-flagellation.

Good thing, too. I’m a procrastinator about most everything. If I had to do certain things to gain God’s support, I’d probably put it off and then miss the deadline.

By the way, anybody know when that deadline is? When the due date for Christ’s return is?

Me neither. None of us does. That's why it's important to do those three things sooner rather than later...confess, believe, and ask.

And if you're feeling that today's the day and you're ready to make that change in your life. Ready to make sure God's got your back, I'm happy to pray with you this morning. Come on up at the end of the service. We'll talk to God together.

"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven." Thank God he's going to help us through it all. It may not be easy, but it will be all to his glory. Amen.