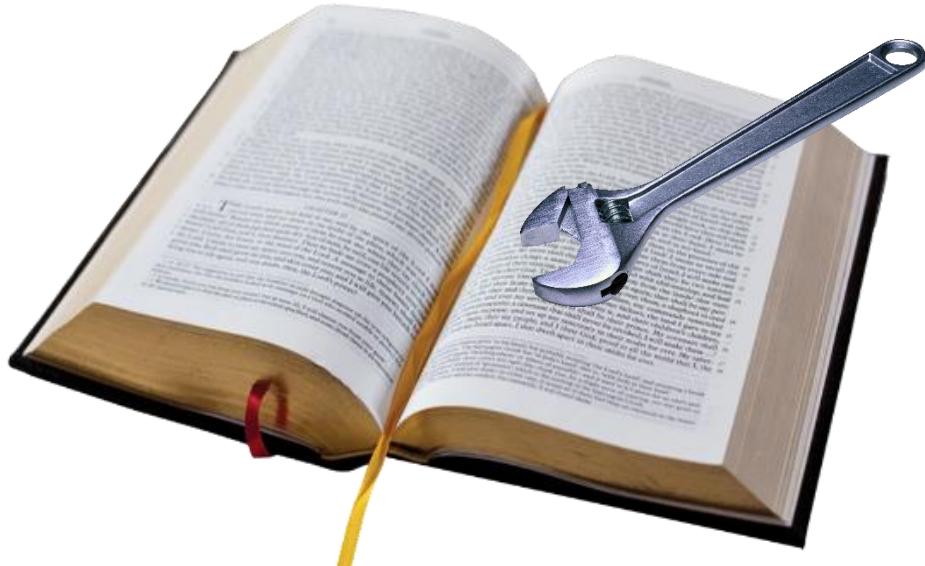


Learning to Adjust Spiritually



Peter McArthur

One of the most pressing needs of the Church today is the adjusting of the mind to God's purposes. We who live in the western world are beset by an attitude that screams at us, "Be an individual", "Do your own thing", "Don't let anyone judge you", "Stick up for your rights". This is not a biblical mentality; it is human wisdom and it's fraught with danger because it actually sets us against God.

There's an urgent need for the Church to take stock, re-visit the Word of God, be willing to adjust to it, and move on in obedience. By doing so we'll have a much better chance of discerning the various seasons of life that come our way, both good and bad.

For example, it's hopeless to think we can navigate the treacherous reefs of a barren spiritual season if we're not firmly on-board the vessel the Lord has provided for us. Noah in the ark is a good encouragement for us. He didn't have all knowledge about what the flood was going to accomplish. He obeyed, he trusted in his God, and he waited out the difficult season he was in. His place in the whole scenario was to trust and obey; God would see to the rest. It was only after the flood that Noah began to understand the season he was in, and even then, it was still step-by-step.

So, it is for us now. Many of the spiritual seasons we find ourselves in bewilder us. We get confused, we cry out for God to intervene, and at times He can seem to be a very long way off. The season we find ourselves in tends to make us focus on self. Have you ever noticed that? When things come against us and the normally comfortable walk of faith is suddenly pushed aside by some tragedy, problem or illness - our immediate reaction is to focus on self. "Why is this happening to **ME**?" "What have I done to deserve this?" "Doesn't God care about **ME**?" "Look at **MY** situation?" Who will help **ME**?"

This is really the same as when we physically hurt ourselves. Cut your finger with a knife, knock your knee on the tow bar of your car, sprain an ankle. Where does your thought fly? To where the pain is. That's where our attention goes to, to the problem area; we focus on the spot where the pain is. This is quite normal and there's nothing wrong in it. But it does serve as a lesson for us when we're injured in our soul life, when a domestic problem arises, or someone betrays you, or a loved-one is diagnosed with cancer, etc. Our minds fly to the problem; we focus on the pain, and it's not very long before we're thinking of all the possible consequences that will soon follow. Financial worries race through the mind; emotional stress builds; how will I cope; my whole life has taken a king hit; life is suddenly in turmoil; how will I get through the months and years ahead?

What throws us off balance is not just the situation and its consequences, but all that surrounds the problem. Often this weighs us down as much or even more so, than the actual issue itself. There's a tendency within us to leap from the situation we find ourselves in, to the foreboding consequences that will accompany it.

I recall one very difficult patch we as a family endured some years ago. All the above things plagued our minds and we were in a very dark season indeed, with great stress, grief and a heavy sense of despair. We were very much like David when he said:

"I am bent down, I am bowed down exceedingly; I go mourning all the day. My loins are filled with a burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am exceedingly benumbed and crushed. I howl from the groaning of my heart. My Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my power forsakes me! And the light of my eyes is no longer with me." (Psa 38:6-10).

This was a dark season for all of us. But one night as the awfulness of the situation seemed to get worse, I went outside to put out the rubbish bin for pickup next morning. As I walked back to the house, heavy of heart, I looked up at a clear night sky and saw the myriad stars of the Milky Way in all its beauty. As I looked up my heart cried out to God, not to intervene, not to change things, but just to speak to me.

Instantly I heard a deep echo within, that consoling voice that simply said, "The stars will still shine tomorrow." I knew heaven had spoken. Hope had been imparted. What a relief it brought to my troubled soul! What refreshment it gave to my anxious mind! Even my flesh was relieved from the build-up of stress in it. God had answered, not by delivering us out of the horror of the season, but by assuring us that whatever the outcome, "the stars would still be shining afterwards".

You see, they were His stars, He had set them in place, and for me it served as a perfect reminder that He had appointed them for signs and seasons. In the end we were delivered from much of the negativity of that season, but we still had to go through a great deal, enduring much heaviness. When that particular season had passed us by, I knew we had to learn from it, as stressful as it was. But He was there, with us in the season, not forsaking us, but speaking hope in the midst of it.

God was eliciting a response from us by speaking to us of hope, faithfulness and stability. All of these very things came to pass out of that season, and it has brought a different level of maturity and discipleship to us. It has also made me become much more aware of the hurt and pain of others, and I am able to more closely identify with people in similar situations. Bless His name! Indeed, it is very true "...that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..." (Phlp 1:12).

I share these things, not to draw attention to myself, but to encourage you that whatever seasons might befall us, the Father is totally and utterly aware of them, and fully aware of our feelings, emotions and pain during such times. Sometimes we can only truly learn something by going through it. I say this not to ignore the reality of the pain and suffering, but to highlight the reality of being transformed by it. As a Pastor I now discipline myself to not speak empty platitudes to people; they did me no good when we were suffering, when good-minded saints spoke platitudes to us (a little like Job's friends I suppose). I know their heart was toward our situation with concern, but in the end we were going through it, not them.

I don't mean this to be an accusation in any way: loyal Christian friends are extremely supportive and their prayers most valuable. But I now realize what we needed most were words of wise counsel based on Scripture, not advice out of man's experience. Above all we needed to hear what heaven had to say! Such episodes in a believer's life add to the experience and knowledge of understanding seasons and times.

I've heard it said that African Christians look into another believer's eyes searching for the Cross. In other words, they want to know if you've been with Christ "**in the fellowship of His sufferings**" (Phlp 3:10). Whether the saying is true or not, it certainly makes the point. The point is, grace is always available in any season; it's just that in some seasons it's more apparent than in others. The work of grace upon one's soul can be seen to act in two distinct ways.

One work of the Holy Spirit on the soul is to break down all our self-centeredness. Another work is to exalt Christ as "above all", particularly over our soul-life. The result of both is for the full salvation of one's soul, and the glorification of God. The Lord will use all, and any season, to bring this about. Our seeming difficulty is discerning what the seasons mean, what is to be learnt, and how to stand firm while we undergo the season of change or trial. It's usually too late to learn the lesson if we haven't prepared for such times beforehand. This is why dying daily unto one's soul-life is vital (Lk 9:23).

It's important to take advantage of the good seasons and beneficial times as they come to us. Use such occasions for the benefit of your soul. Go into the secret place (Psa. 91:1 and Mtt 6:6) and there learn of the Father's ways. By regularly doing this in the good seasons, we prepare ourselves for any difficult season that may come. It's then far easier to stand during the times of uncertainty, because you've been inwardly prepared well beforehand.

Strange as it may seem the best lessons are learnt in seasons of affliction. So, we do need to prepare for them. It's in those seasons when temptation, distress, trouble and humiliation abound, that we learn the wonderful secrets of heavenly wisdom. Why? Because during such times we discover our own weakness, the folly of trusting in the flesh, as well as the sustaining power and love of a faithful Father.

I realize only too well that sprouting Bible texts doesn't always bring comfort and relief in seasons of perplexity, whether you're saying them to yourself, or someone else says them to you. Our soul can so easily want to give up, to walk away, to blame God, and yes, even to accuse Him of letting such things happen. But He has called us, and He remains faithful to us.

So, we find ourselves holding on when there seems to be little to hold onto. We almost want to throw it all away, yet strangely we keep on coming back. The Bible might seem veiled to us, empty of power even; but still we look at that Book on the table and maybe feel guilty because we know that in it are the truths that will fill the void. We want so much to come out

of this dry, barren, deathly season, but we know so frustratingly well, that we cannot hasten its time.

Slowly we begin to understand the eternal truth that “**the times and seasons the Father has set by His own authority**” can be counted on (Acts 1:7). And when He sends the season of favour, nothing but nothing, can hold it back! The seasons of one’s life, like the seasons of creation, will continue under the awesome oversight of our Father in heaven.

One of the greatest ways to adjust to the Father’s purpose is to pay close attention to His grand work, the glorious panorama of what His will is truly about. By carefully and slowly reading both Ephesians and Colossians, we gain a majestic insight to the splendour of the Father’s resolution to “**bring many sons into glory**” (Heb 2:10) so that in His perfect timing “**God will be all in all**” (1 Cor 15:28).

It’s in Ephesians that we find Jesus depicted as Lord of the Church, and in Colossians He’s declared to be Lord of the Universe. By keeping this in balance and allowing its profound truths to penetrate our minds, we are lifted in our inner life, and find that strange comfort of knowing we’ve seen right into the Mind of God’s purposes. Astonishing!

If you’ve never done this, I do encourage you to set aside time and read Ephesians and then go straight into Colossians – in one reading. They are both relatively short writings, but I warn you, as you allow the Holy Spirit to stir you, you may end up spending hours in those two extravagantly rich books.

And once you’ve done it, do it again. Allow the Spirit TIME to work on your inner-man so the truths of those books find a deep echo within. For He who has called you and set you aside as His child wants you to come to a wonderful place of spiritual insight – something He’s purposed from the beginning by making “**known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Christ**” (Eph 1:9).

So brethren, in this season we need a greater adjusting to take place in our lives, both outward and inward. The End is indeed encroaching upon us, and the call of the Spirit’s voice is to be ready. Please saints, learn to “**redeem the time**” (Eph 5:16) for as Jesus said, “**the night is coming when no man shall work**” (Jhn 9:4).

However, take heart, we are being taught by Him and sooner or later all whom He has called will know the full measure of that special season when He sends “**rain and fruitful seasons to us from heaven, filling our hearts with food and gladness.**” (Acts 14:17).

So, Father we do pray, crying out to You “**teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom**” (Psa 90:12).

Grace in Jesus to you.

Peter McArthur issachar.org