

Lesson From the Four Seasons

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You know, God is the author of variety; I don't know if you've ever thought about that. If we look around at creation, God is certainly the author of variety. Think of the plant kingdom. Look at all the flowers—different colors, different shapes, different sizes. Shrubs, trees, grasses, look at all the variety in the plant kingdom. Then in the animal kingdom we have amoebas to elephants, crocodiles to panda bears—look at that variety. Then the colors; God could have easily designed our eyes to receive only black and white—very easy—but He designed our eyes to see a wider bandwidth of visible light and look at the colors we can perceive. Then the tastes—all of the different tastes—and I think I've mentioned this once before, a long while ago, when our granddaughter (this goes back about fifteen years) when she was not quite one, we had a chance to go visit our son Brit and his wife Julie in Minneapolis. Little Josie was around a year old and it happened to be, that the day after we got there that Julie was going to feed Josie solid foods for the first time. All she had experienced up to that time was her mother's milk; no variety—nothing. So we were there and it was pureed pumpkin or squash, kind of that color—a little bit was put in a spoon and put on her lips and she didn't know what to make of it, but all of a sudden when that food hit her lips, she just froze and her eyes got big as saucers. Then she started working her tongue and lips trying to get it in and then her legs started kicking and her arms started flailing and she says, muh, muh, muh, meaning more, more. It was kind of a graphic demonstration of variety and how we are blessed and we take it for granted.

We also know, speaking of variety, that God is the author of the seasons and the resulting changes in climate due to those seasons. God did that by tilting the earth's axis. If this is the sun and this is the earth and this is the north-south axis, God tilted the earth's axis twenty-three and a half degrees. So if this is the sun and now the earth is tilted *this way*, you see the northern hemisphere is tilted away from the sun. This is where we are right now. In about three weeks, we will hit what is called the winter solstice. Solstice is a Latin word coming from the Latin word sol and sistere which means sun (sol) come to a stop. So the fading sun comes to a stop and we have less daylight, longer nights and this is in U.S. terms, the official beginning of winter. It occurs on December 21 or 22 depending on the year. Then, as the earth starts to move around the sun *like this* we come into the spring and we have what is called the vernal equinox. Vernal is Latin for spring and equinox means equal night. So as we come from winter towards spring, because of the tilt of the axis we have equal days and equal nights—the spring equinox. This is the official starting of spring for us. Then as the earth comes around into summer, we have the summer solstice and that is the longest daylight time of the year, June 20th through 21st. We have long hot days, shorter nights, sometimes the nights get really hot and that is the official beginning of summer. Then the earth comes around to where we were at Feast time, where we have the autumnal equinox. Twelve hours of day and twelve hours of night, that's generally September 22 or 23 and it is the official beginning of autumn. Because of that tilt—and

we don't know when God did it, did He do it at the flood, could be—we have a variety of seasons. Much has been made about that, the famous composer Vivaldi composed a whole symphony called the Four Seasons and he put those various seasons to music. Then of course we have some of God's people who want to escape the seasons. People go to Florida or Arizona or Hawaii to try to get away from whatever season they don't like. Personally, I love the four seasons; it marks a progression each year. We can kind of follow this routine through the year. To me, if you had only one season it would be really boring—really, really boring. But some people I suppose, like that.

The fact is, God created the seasons for very, very specific reasons. He created a planting season, He created a growing season, He created a harvest season and then God created the holy days that are related to these seasons and the resulting agricultural harvests during those seasons. With that in mind, let's go to Ecclesiastes 3—if you have a ribbon or marker, you probably want to put it there, we're only going to cover a couple of verses but we'll refer to them during the sermon—Ecclesiastes 3:1. Notice what it says in the first sentence.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *To every thing there is a season ...* (KJV)

That's a pretty blanket statement; to everything there is a season. The Hebrew word for "season" means an appointed occasion or an appointed time. What we're being told here is everything has an appointed time by God. We're going to see that an appointed time physically as well as an appointed time spiritually. There's a lot to the meaning of the seasons. If you were around during the folk music craze of the 1960's, a song writer and performer named Pete Seagar wrote a song called Turn, Turn, Turn (if you remember that) and it was written around these very verses. It was very popular in the 1960's. The question becomes, why did God create four seasons? He could have created any seasons He wants, or no seasons, but He created four seasons and we're going to find out that there are lessons and perspectives that the four seasons give us. Physical perspectives and lessons, spiritual perspectives and lessons. So the title of the sermon is:

Lessons from the Four Seasons

What we're going to do is talk about each of the seasons in turn and we're going to examine the physical aspects of those seasons first and then the spiritual aspects. The physical aspects, we'll talk about the earth and the land around us but we'll also talk about ourselves—our bodies—the seasons of our growth and maturity. Then we'll talk about the spiritual aspects because they are intertwined.

God begins the year in the spring, so we're going to begin this discussion in the spring—about the spring. So let's look at the physical aspects of the spring. The one thing that stands out is there is newness of life; there's fast growth, there's energy. Ecclesiastes 3, in the beginning of verse 2 says, a time to be born. My wife is the first one to spot the first little crocus plant popping its head out of the ground and she gets so excited about that. You see things coming up and colors coming out of the ground—

the flowers and the leaves—and in the Northwest, if you're driving through the woods, particularly in the spring time, the leaves on the trees are a lime green. They will change to a darker green later in the year but in the beginning are these bright lime green leaves that just stand out and grab your attention—vibrant colors. Then of course, if you're a rancher or a farmer you have young colts, lambs and calves running and jumping all over the place. You can drive down in a farming area and see colts or calves just kicking up their back legs, running around, full of energy and life. Then in Ecclesiastes 3 in the later part of verse 2 it says it is a time to plant—the spring. What the farmers do is begin a process in the spring that will yield fruit in a later season. It's a process, certain things have to happen in between the planting and the harvesting, we'll see, but the farmers begin a process in the spring.

The same is true, when you think about, for our physical bodies. Let's say our human spring is from birth to late teens, maybe early twenties—that's our human spring. Look at the radical growth in a baby. It comes out of the womb and about a year later that little baby can walk and that little baby can start to talk and communicate—radical changes. Little kids who are just, two, three, four, five, seven, eight years old are just filled with energy. They are jumping and skipping and bouncing around. When my wife was about that age, her mother nick-named her jumpy because she would not stay still; she was just jumping everywhere, skipping everywhere. In that stage of our life, everything is new, everything is exciting, there is wonderment in kids' eyes that we see. My wife and I go to a movie once or twice a year and we went to a movie this past week—we didn't see this particular movie; it was one of these multiplex things—they had a movie called Frozen and apparently the kids just go nuts over this movie. We saw a little girl about three, three and a half, walking toward the particular door to go into and her eyes were as big as saucers and this was just an incredible experience. She was holding her little doll and she was so excited she couldn't stand it because she was going to see this movie that these kids like; just a time of wonderment.

We know that in our human spring, we are totally dependent on our parents, for food, clothing, shelter. If we didn't have our parents, we would die. In that sense, kids grow up learning to be very dependent on mom and dad. But over time, we begin to grow a little bit in independence as kids. Probably the first example of that would be learning to ride a bike. That's an exciting time for a kid because now you can do something on your own and you can ride around the neighborhood or ride off into a field or something like that; it's a little bit of independence. Of course, by the time we reach our teenage years, the big demarcation is learning to drive a car. Now you can go where you want to go and mom and dad aren't necessarily looking over your shoulders. It's a growing and a maturing process where you step out a bit on your own.

The problem is, in the spring time of our lives as humans, we as young kids and even young teenagers, are naive about the realities of life. We don't even give them a thought. We don't even consider health problems, money problems, that there is danger—parents have to educate kids that you can't run across the street or educate kids that if a stranger starts talking to you and wants you to go with them, you cannot do that. A child in and of itself doesn't even think about that. [They] are totally unaware of

danger. Of course in the spring time of our life, we don't think about growing old. As a teenager, it doesn't even register about growing old or that there will come a time when you will no longer exist on this earth—doesn't even register in the spring time of our life. Everything is new and fresh and exciting and it's a wonderful time for a kid. A little bit naive, but that is the spring of our life.

Now let's take that concept—the spring of our physical lives—and look at the spring of our spiritual lives. When did our spring begin? It began with our calling, didn't it? Let's go to 2 Timothy 1:9. God issued us a calling and with that calling began our spiritual life. I'll read out of the King James unless I tell you otherwise.

2 Timothy 1:9 *Who [referring to God the Father] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began ... (KJV)*

So at some point, God issued a calling to all of us. We wouldn't be here if we didn't answer that call. When first coming into the truth, we were just like little kids, weren't we? We were excited, we were enthusiastic, we talked about it incessantly. I remember my first Passover that was in Roma hall in Detroit Michigan and walked in for Passover and there were 2000 people there taking Passover. I looked around and said, wow, this is something—foot washing 2000 people—I had never seen the like. Then that first Feast, there were 9000 or 10,000 under a tent in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania. I remember the song leader, the very first night cued up the piano player and raised his hands and 10,000 voices began to sing. Talk about exciting, getting goose bumps and what a Feast that was.

Again we were like little kids, we studied and prayed incessantly, we wanted to incessantly talk about this new truth with other people, we wouldn't dare miss a Sabbath service. I remember a few weeks ago Jack telling me that he and Marie lived here in Kennewick and there was a Wednesday night Bible study in Spokane—that's 300 miles round trip—and every Wednesday they went to Bible study in Spokane. Zeal, enthusiasm, excitement and I can remember it never entered your mind that you wouldn't be there because we were so excited. We call that first love. We know—we won't turn there—in Revelation 2 in the letter to Ephesus, Christ chides them because they left their first love. We have all experienced first love, as the letter I read in the announcements and when we came in the spring time of our spiritual life—came into the church—we idealized the church. Just like kids idealize their mom and dad, we idealize the church. We came in—at least I did—and assumed the church was perfect and I assumed that everybody I met in church, Feast and otherwise, was absolutely perfect. I wasn't, but I was trying to get there and everybody else was perfect. In that sense, we assume the church and the people in it were perfect and we idealized the church, just like infants idealize their parents. Remember as infants, as I mentioned earlier, we are totally dependent on our parents and when we were in our spiritual spring, we were totally dependent on the church. We came in and were absolutely dependent on the church. Let's go to Acts 20 and we'll begin in verse 17. The church

had a job to do and the church did that and we were the recipients of that. Paul is traveling, verse 17.

Acts 20:17 *And from Miletus he [referring to Paul] sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. (KJV)*

He called for a meeting of all the elders and in verse 28, Paul is now speaking.

28) Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, [here's the admonition, here's the assignment] to feed the church of God, which he [referring to Jesus Christ] hath purchased with his own blood. (KJV)

So the church was like our mother that breastfed us, so to speak. We look to the church to provide the food—the spiritual food—that we needed. God created the spring holy days for a purpose and we know that through Passover, we find that nothing is possible without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We know through the days of Unleavened Bread that we have to continually work to put sin out of our lives. Pentecost, with the coming of God's Spirit, we know absolutely that we cannot please God, we cannot do anything lasting and permanent without God's Holy Spirit being behind it and motivating us.

Here's a point to consider. In the springtime of our spiritual lives, we grew fast in physical aspects of spiritual matters. We grew fast in physical aspects of spiritual matters. What do I mean by that? We grew really fast in keeping the Sabbath physically. We wouldn't dare set foot in work after the sun goes down and we did certain things that we wouldn't do otherwise and didn't do things on the Sabbath that we would in the other six days. We learn that very fast. We learned physically to write a check or to give our tithes to the church and we did that faithfully for every pay period. We physically learned, very quickly to avoid certain kinds of food. It would gag us to think about getting near pork or seafood or something like that, so we learned the physical aspects of spiritual matters because these are symbols of deeper spiritual lessons that we need to learn. The more important, deeper spiritual lessons would occur later in the other seasons of our lives. We were really good with the physical stuff.

Like little kids, being naive about reality, we believed the church was perfect and we believed the people in the church were perfect. We also believed back then—at least I did and I think most of the people I knew—was that there was an easy path to the Kingdom of God, as long as we were with this group. It was THE church of God and as long as we were a member of THE church of God, then what God would do was set our little pink fannies down on a greased slide, plop us down and *swish*, we would go into the Kingdom and all would be well. We had that naive belief just as little kids have certain naive beliefs. In my experience, the common belief was—it was touched on in the sermonette—was that bad things don't happen to God's people unless you are sinning and then if something bad happens, people would murmur among themselves

about what was her sin or his sin because bad things don't happen to God's people. We were naive to Acts 14:22, let's turn there. We read these scriptures in the spring time of our spiritual life but if you are like me, they just didn't register. We just didn't take them to heart.

Acts 14:22 [Paul is speaking] *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.* (KJV)

We could spend the rest of the time going through other scriptures that say the same thing, but the fact is, it's not an easy path; it is a narrow path and much tribulation will come. In the spring time of our spiritual life we were naive to that.

Such was our spiritual spring. Now what about summer. Let's look at the physical aspects of summer. The one thing we note about summer is consistent heat. The days get hotter, the nights get hotter and that consistent heat brings steady growth in the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom, for that matter. We have some ivy draping over a wall and I can go out in the middle of summer and trim it back and I've walked out the next day and seen that same ivy stalk grow a couple of inches—when it's hot in the day and hot in the night. I remember as a young kid, we would travel to East Texas to visit my grandmother and granddad and one time he took us out to a cornfield; my cousins were there and my brother and I and he said, be quiet—just be quiet—tell me what you hear. We heard this rustling. I asked, grandpa what's that? It's the corn growing. The husks are moving as the corn grows inside and you can actually hear it. In East Texas it is hot and the soil is black it's so rich. You can actually hear the plants grow. It's due to the constant heat. But during summer, there are obstacles that occur. Storms, pests, diseases, weeds—all of those have to be dealt with in the summer.

The same is true for our physical minds and bodies. Our human summer, for sake of discussion, we'll say our twenties, thirties and forties—that's our spiritual summer. We're mature then, we're not kids anymore but we're not totally mature. We're kind of in between in that regard. We begin experiencing the reality and the challenges and trials of real life. Jobs, education, careers, marriage, raising kids, making money, paying bills—all of those. Occasionally for some people, health problems. It's a time that we face realities that were never even considered as a kid. I can remember my mom saying, wait until you grow up; you have it so easy right now. As I was a five or six-year-old and whining about something. She was right—absolutely right. We never thought of that as a kid and in the summer of our life we begin just getting a hint of real fatigue. Just a hint—twenties, thirties and forties—thought we would get tired but didn't have a clue what tired was really like.

That's the physical summer in our bodies and in the world around us. What about our spiritual summer? In our spiritual summer, there should be steady growth in the deeper spiritual matters of life. Let's go to Matthew 23:23—familiar scripture. Christ is railing on religious leaders of the day and He is chiding them about their behavior; I'll read this

out of the New King James. The whole chapter, we know is Christ correcting the religious leaders; they didn't like it one bit.

Matthew 23:23 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin ... (NKJV)*

And we did that in the spring of our lives, we were so careful just getting it down to the penny and He's saying, you guys do this, but the middle of verse 23:

23 continued) *... and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. (NKJV)*

Wil Berg talked about that in his Bible study at the Feast on Friday night. He said, you guys don't pay attention to justice, mercy and faith but you are so good at the physical stuff of counting out these leaves. Hopefully during the summer of our spiritual life, we begin to understand the spiritual application of God's law. Spiritually keeping the Sabbath and the Holy days—what's in our head, what's in our heart, what are our words. We begin paying attention, hopefully, to the weightier matters of the law. But in our spiritual summer, we also found that trials come.

Just like consistent heat brings forth steady growth, God knows that trials bring forth growth in us. There are things we cannot learn apart from a trial. There are some things you cannot learn unless you go through a trial. Sometimes we go through trials during the summer of our lives and we don't understand why. Gordon was talking about that in the sermonette; sometimes we blame God for this or that. Most of the times we don't blame ourselves. The fact is, God will bring a trial on us to have us grow, give us the opportunity to grow, just as the plants grow—the heat of the trial—but at the time we don't understand the reason. It's been my experience that you don't understand until you're through it on the other side and you can look back. There are some trials and reasons for those trials that we will never know until we talk to God face to face. We just won't know, but God has His reasons. Let's go to Matthew 13:1. If you have a second marker you might want to put it here, we'll come back one more time here. This is the parable of the sower, so we're going to relate this to our spiritual summer.

Matthew 13:1 *The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.*

2) *And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, [He was pressed so to get some space between Him and the crowd] so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. [So He could speak to them better and the water would actually reflect His voice.]*

3) *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; (KJV)*

The aspect we want to focus on here is in jumping to verse 7.

7) *And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:*
(KJV)

In verse 18, we're told:

18) *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.* (KJV)

This aspect He explains in verse 22.

22) *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.* (KJV)

Meaning he stops growing; doesn't exercise God's Holy Spirit or just actually gives up and dies. I think I mentioned it a while back, when we were in Boston in the seventies, of course the church taught it was all going to be over in 1972 and then later in 1975 so a lot of people didn't pay attention to their health, didn't pay attention to long term thinking. This one family owned a home and to save money they didn't buy insurance on the home and the home caught fire and burned down—they lost everything. They had no insurance. God says, okay, here it is, this is reality. Their reaction to that was to get angry with God—how dare You do this to us, how can You do this to us and they left the church over this. They became so bitter toward God, they left the church. That same thing can happen to another family and they use it as a chance to grow and a chance to mature. I remember Jack and Marie lost their home about twenty years ago. They're reaction was, okay God dealt this, He knew about it, He allowed it to happen so it must be for a reason so let's learn the reason, grow from that and go forward. That was literal heat burning down that house, but we can either let it choke us out or we can grow from it. The heat brings the growth.

In the summer of our spiritual lives, we begin to face the reality about the church too. We find out that ministers aren't perfect. In fact, some ministers don't exercise God's Spirit very well and some of them are narcissistic—all about them, not about service. We also have found that there are ministers or have been ministers that are wolves in sheep's clothing—they are not converted and are plants from Satan to lead people away from God, not to God. We found that out in the summer of our spiritual lives.

We also found out that the members aren't perfect. What a revelation—some members don't exercise God's spirit and we're part of that too. We go through periods of time that we don't exercise God's spirit very well and we realize that and we realize also that there are tares in the church. There are plants by Satan that are not converted, that are there to cause disruption in the church. To lead people astray. But also during the summer of our spiritual lives, we have the beginnings of real, lasting fruit because of the trials, because of the experiences. Let's go to Psalm 1:1. It's interesting that this subject is raised in the very first three verses of the very first Psalm. We're very familiar with the first part of verse 1 and 2.

Psalm 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

2) *But his delight is in the law of the Lord [Jehovah, God]; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (KJV)*

This person is God-centered. Delights in God's law, meditates in God's law but notice verse 3.

3) *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (KJV)*

Spiritual summer is the beginning of real lasting fruit. Beginning to have the character of God, the mind of God, the mind of Jesus Christ. So as physical fruit begins to mature in summer time, spiritual fruit begins to mature in the summer of our lives.

Now let's go to Autumn, the third season and let's look at the physical aspect. Autumn is my favorite season. The sun is starting to get lower on the horizon, the shadows get longer and because the sun is lower, the light has to go through more of the atmosphere so the light takes on a golden glow in the autumn. The crop has had all summer to mature and now is ready for the harvest. In Ecclesiastes 3:2 we are told there is a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. There is a season to harvest, so with that in mind let's go to Jeremiah 5:20 and see an interesting statement in Jeremiah. He is condemning Judah and we're going to break into this condemnation in verse 20 and just to get the context.

Jeremiah 5:20 *Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying ... (KJV)*

Now look at verse 24.

24) *Neither say they [the ones that are being condemned] in their heart [this is something we should say in our heart], Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season [Jehovah's season]: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. (KJV)*

It's wonderful, in the autumn of the year, to drive through the countryside and see workers out there cutting grapes off the grapevine to go to the winery or seeing workers on their three legged ladders, climbing up in the trees and pulling apples down to go to the processing plant or cutting hop vines and throwing on the back of a flatbed truck and they go to be processed—it is the harvest season. God created that harvest season and we often talk—I remember—every night of the Feast, you look out and see a big full moon and we often call that a harvest moon. Back in the old days, before electricity, farmers used to harvest in the light of the harvest moon, that's how it got the name. The important thing is, here in the autumn, you have a harvest but a whole lot of things had

to happen before, to make that harvest possible. Think of all the things that have to go into those plants and to the ground to make that harvest possible.

Our human autumn, let's just call it our fifties and sixties. As the leaves fall off the trees, sometimes you wonder what body part is going to fall off next. We have our aches and pains, our physical bodies are in decline, we begin to feel much more fatigue in our fifties and sixties than we ever did before and we begin to have physical limitations. There are just things we can no longer do that we could do in our twenties, thirties and forties. So we are in physical decline in the autumn of our life.

Let's look at the characteristics now of our spiritual autumn. Our spiritual autumn—yes we have declining physical capabilities—but in our spiritual autumn we can develop deep spiritual maturity and deep wisdom. If we apply ourselves and we exercise God's Holy Spirit. Let's go back to the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, we'll pick this up in verse 8. We're going to look at another aspect of this parable.

Matthew 13:8 *But other [seeds] fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (KJV)*

Jumping to verse 23.

23) But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (KJV)

So, during the harvest, there are those that grow a great deal and bear fruit. We're told—we won't turn there—but in John 15:8, Christ's last words, where He said, here-in is My Father glorified that you bear much fruit and so shall you be My disciple. Hopefully during the autumn of our lives, we bear Godly fruit and we develop true wisdom and we attain the mind of Christ, as we're admonished in Philippians 2:5. That's our goal is to have the character, the behavior, the thoughts, the deeds, the words, that Jesus Christ had when He walked this earth and set the example.

Of course, God created the fall Holy days around the harvest time. We know at the Feast of Tabernacles, it pictures a great harvest and we know it's a joyful time of God coming to the earth to dwell with His people and it's an opportunity for mankind to attain eternal life also. The point is, in the autumn of our spiritual lives, now we're starting to think about different matters than we did in our twenties, thirties and forties—in our summer. We begin to have more of a sense of urgency because we realize we are on the other side of the mid-point of our life—we're on the downhill side in our fifties and sixties; time is running out and at some point our judgement day will come. So we begin to think about different things. Remember what Peter says in his first epistle, the time has come for judgement to come upon the house of God. So we begin to think about that. Let's go to Matthew 25 and let's just quickly skim through the parable of the talents. I'll read this out of the New King James, begin in verse 14. Whenever we read

the phrase, for the kingdom of God is like, our antenna should go up—we should think about this seriously.

Matthew 25:14 *For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.*

15) *And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.*

16) *Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.*

17) *And likewise he who had received two gained two more also.*

18) *But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. (NKJV)*

Now verse 19, we've all been there.

19) *After a long time ... (NKJV)*

Frankly, we would all admit that time is much longer than we thought. I never dreamed we would be here and getting close to 2020. If you asked in the 1970's and 1960's, would God's church still be functioning in 2020 and Christ hadn't returned yet, you would have been laughed out of the room, but here we are.

19 continued) *... the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. (NKJV)*

So the master came and wanted to find out what did you do with what I gave you? I gave it to you according to your abilities so there is no discrimination. What did you do with what you were given—that's the big question, verse 20.

20) *So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying ... (NKJV)*

Look, I've doubled your money, I've doubled the investment you gave me. Verse 21.

21) *His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' [Your master].*

That's the kingdom. So in verse 22 and 23, the one who doubled—was given two and doubled his—their reward was exactly the same. Now I'll read verse 24 out of the New Living Translation.

24) *Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate.'*

25) *I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.*

26) *But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate,*

27) *why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'* (NLT)

So we see that this individual did not exercise and grow God's Holy Spirit given to him. Then in verse 28, back to the New King James.

28) *So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.*

29) *'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.*

30) *And cast the unprofitable servant [this is the key, unprofitable] into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* (NLT)

In Thayer's [Greek Lexicon](#), the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth", Thayer says, *a phase denoting the extreme anguish and utter despair*. My guess is at that time, there will be those who hate themselves because they realize they blew it. I had the opportunity and I blew it. I believe there are others who are going to actually hate God. How can you do this to me? Didn't I say, Lord, Lord? Didn't we publish books and I tithed and we had TV programs and did all this other stuff and what did Christ say—what did He say? Not everybody that says, Lord, Lord, is going to enter into the Kingdom of God but those who do what I say will enter the Kingdom of God. There is going to be weeping and gnashing of teeth. You're afraid to say it but I think some people are going to die cursing God because He didn't do what they wanted Him to do or what they thought they deserved.

We need to realize that in this stage of life, time is running out; we don't have that much time left. At some point, we come to the realization that in the not too distant future, I'm going to have to answer as to what I have done with what God has given me. I'm going to have to stand before Christ our judge and justify what I've done and what I haven't done, and we think about that. As with the physical harvest in the autumn, our spiritual harvest is the result of all that went before. When our harvest comes, when it's time for us to give account, it is the result of everything that has gone before in our lives. Just like the physical harvest is a result of all of the plowing and the planting and the fertilizing and the weed picking and all of that, the harvest we get is the result of everything that happened before.

In our fifties and sixties, we realize that the fall harvest isn't that far off. It's not that many years off. In the fall, the leaves change and there is a brilliance in the fall. We lived in New England—I was in the Air Force in the upper peninsula in Michigan—and the falls there are nothing like the falls in the Northwest, in the sense that you have reds, yellows, bright rust colors and the leaves just explode and it's just gorgeous. The point is, in the autumn of our life, a well-lived spiritual life—lived God's way—can produce beautiful fruit, just like those leaves in the autumn.

Now we get to where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. What about the winter of our lives—what about that? The physical aspects of winter—the land has a different kind of beauty, doesn't it? The leaves are off the tree, you see the trunk and the branches and the twigs in stark relief against a winter sky. The land is at peace, the land is at rest. The little critters are down in their burrows and the land is quiet. We like to take walks in the snow or after a snow has occurred. You walk when snow is on the ground and it is so quiet. It's just wonderful—it's just really nice. Let's call our spiritual winter—it's obviously old age—and let's say it's our sixties until the time we die. My wife has a hard time admitting that because it was only a few years ago she admitted she was middle-aged. But we're there—we're in the winter of our lives—we are. The fact is, when you are in the winter of your life, the bodily processes—the metabolism—slows down. Everything slows down. We have a decline of physical energy, a decline of stamina and strength, we move more slowly like everything does in winter. Like everything does in winter, in the cold you just move more slowly. It is no accident, it is not a coincidence that when we reach the winter of our lives, our hair changes color and it changes to the color of snow. I don't think that is an accident, it is by design. God's reminding us, hey folks, like it or not you are in the winter of your life. I know some gray early—our son had gray hair in his late twenties, but I'm talking generally speaking and certainly when we're in our sixties or seventies, there is plenty of gray hair there.

During our winter, we feel real fatigue. We thought we got tired before but we really get tired now. I've told younger people—I had an employee once, we sold our business when I was in my early sixties and I was traveling 1000-1200 miles a week, working sixty to eighty hours in my early sixties and I told him (he was in his late twenties) you think you are tired, you don't know what tired means. We'll find out later.

We also, in the winter of our lives, most all of us suffer pain in some form or fashion. For many of us, pain becomes a constant companion—it is just there. Part of it is paying for our youthful indiscretions and when we did it—when we were in our teens or twenties—we had no conception that fifty years later, you're going to pay for what you are doing right now, but we didn't believe it and here we are paying for it. God allows that—that fatigue and the pain—to show us that our physical life shouldn't be the goal. If this is eternal life, if I have to live eternal life in what I'm suffering right now, I'm not sure I want that. It is pain, it is fatigue, it is diminished capabilities. Of course our physical winter ends in death. Ecclesiastes 3:2, remember we were told there is a time to be born but in the next phrase it says, and a time to die. It's part of life. Death is part of life. We begin to accept death's reality.

My wife and I, a number of years ago, went to visit a church member, her name was Vivian York. Vivian was in her late sixties and she had had a very hard life. Farming all her life, she had lost her husband a few years before and she was living in a single wide trailer near Royal city, which is a farming community in central Washington, living on the edge of a field. We went to visit her because she was anxious and nervous and worried about death. She wasn't terminally ill at all—she had her physical trials, yes, because of that, and she lost her husband, she was worried about death. She had been a

converted member of God's church for a number of years, so we walked into her little trailer and she sat on the couch and we were opposite in two chairs and she was uptight. Her shoulders were uptight, her arms were across, she wasn't leaning back into the couch—she was nervous, she was worried. We were there two to three hours and we went through the scriptures about God's Holy Spirit and conversion and then we went through scriptures about life and death and what happens after death and that it's a sleep and there is a resurrection and then there is a resurrection to a life far different than the life you have ever experienced and we went through those. You could see, it took a while, but you could see her shoulders kind of relax and see her sink back into the couch and the wrinkles on her face began to not be so wrinkly, her face was relaxing and her voice was more calm and by the time we were finished, she had made a turnaround in the sense that you could tell, she was relaxed, she wasn't fearful of dying and it was God's spirit that was doing it. We were just reading scriptures and talking but it was God's spirit that gave her a sense of peace. Christ said, I'll give you peace—the world doesn't understand it—I'll give you peace. Christ and God did. When we left, she was relaxed, happy, peaceful, very calm and very quiet. We went home and the next day we got a call that she died that night. She just died peacefully in her sleep and what a blessing. She got to the point where she faced reality that death is part of the winter of my life—it ends that way.

Now let's talk, in the time remaining, about the spiritual aspects of our spiritual winter. I think we all—I don't know if you've ever thought about it—there's obviously no Holy days in the winter. You ask yourself, why and I think God is telling us that His plan for us is winding down. It's starting to wind down and finish up in our spiritual winter. The Bible tells us, in our spiritual winter, we can continue to grow and develop mature fruit in our spiritual winter. Let's go to Psalm 92:12. Mature fruit can continue to be developed despite the fact that our physical capabilities are in decline—even our mental capabilities are in decline. We can still continue to develop beautiful fruit.

Psalm 92:12 *The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.* (KJV)

Notice the beginning of verse 14.

14) *They shall still bring forth fruit in old age;* (KJV)

So being in the winter of our life—there's no reason why we can't continue to develop fruit; in fact it's required of us. The fruit that we should develop, in some ways is even greater because in our old age, we turn away from the physical, the temporary, the carnal, because they aren't important. The things that got us excited in our twenties and thirties, don't get us as excited now because they are temporary, they are carnal, they are physical. The things that attract a young kid don't matter to somebody in the winter of their lives.

We tend to focus on first things. What's important and what's not. The two great commandments—really, really important on those; loving God with all of our being,

being God-centered and taking that love and loving our neighbor as ourselves. We also focus on the family—on our physical family and on our spiritual church family. Remember what the Apostle John said (we won't turn there, 1 John 3:14), I've mentioned it before, it hit me like a thunderbolt. We know that we have passed from death into life. Why? Because we love the brethren and he that doesn't love the brethren abides in death. We learn that and we focus on that and our church family means more and more to us in the winter of our lives.

Of course we focus on the Kingdom—that is our goal, that is our reward and that becomes a greater focus for someone in the winter of their life. The blessing of being in the winter of our lives is that because of our physical limitations, we begin to rely more on God and more on His Son to get us through. Anybody that's converted and, in their sixties, seventies and beyond, knows that we rely more on God to come and rescue us, to take care of us and to provide for us, more than we did when we were younger because we could do a lot ourselves and now we can't. Because of our physical limitations, we realize that we are nothing without God and Christ. We are nothing without God's Spirit in us. Let's go to John 15:5 really quick—we won't even turn there, you know it by heart. Christ said I am the vine, you are the branches, if we abide in Him we will bring forth much fruit because He said, (verse 15) without Me, you can do nothing. We realize that in our old age, in the winter of our life.

The other good thing—a blessing in old age—humility generally comes easier. We're not so cocky, we're not so self-reliant and we see that we're not as strong, we're not as sharp, we don't have as much energy, we don't have as much stamina and it's easier to admit there are things I can't do anymore—just can't do it. The mind says I can do it, but the body says, no you can't. We try sometimes and we hurt ourselves because there are things we cannot do.

Also, in the winter of our lives, we more freely admit that there's things that I don't yet understand yet. Someday I will. Maybe I'll understand it before I die, maybe I won't. It's easier to admit in the winter of your life, I have been wrong and I can be wrong. Before we jump and do something, we're a little more hesitant because I've blown it in the past and I better be careful. Don't go where angels fear to tread—be very, very careful. In the winter of our lives we reflect back—at least I do— on my sins and on my mistakes, because I am bound and determined that I am not going to repeat those. The elderly have a lot of experience, both good and bad.

I think most people know the name Mark Twain. He died in 1910 and he was from Oklahoma and was a writer and humorist and cowboy, a lecturer and published and wrote newspaper articles and he wrote the following: *Good judgement comes from experience. Absolutely true—good judgment comes from experience, but he went on to say: Most experience comes from bad judgement. We learn from our mistakes. Good judgement comes from experience, most experience comes from bad judgement. We look back and shake our heads at ourselves. How could I have done that; how could I have said that. Because of that, the elderly can be a source of wisdom for others. I think most of us remember Andy Rooney. He was a journalist and author and had a*

segment on 60 Minutes for several decades—very funny and humorous—and he said once, the best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person. Why did he say that? He said, an elderly person has had good experiences and bad experiences and elderly people can help you (we would say today, an elderly person in God's church) can help you avoid sin, avoid errors in judgement and avoid mistakes because they have been there and done that.

So in the winter of our lives we begin to appreciate peace and quiet. The time for fighting has passed. That's why old men send young men to war. We want to be peacemakers. What did Christ say? Blessed are the peacemakers because they shall be called the children of God. We want peace, we want to make peace. At this time in our lives, we especially appreciate the fruits of God's spirit. Especially love, peace, gentleness, goodness—we appreciate that very much. Those who winter well—you've heard the term that some people winter well—people who winter well in God's church are examples to all of us. Elderly people (and I'm not talking about myself because my brains says, you aren't elderly) can have a pleasant spirit about them, a peaceful spirit about them, they've run their race, they know their reward is not far off and they are peaceful about it. The elderly can set a good example by their fruits. I remember Ivan and Edna Robinson, some of you don't know them but they lived up north of Spokane—wonderful couple, they owned an apple orchard and they were just two peas in a pod and the older they got, the more they looked alike. They were arm in arm and I never heard them say a negative word about anybody. They're both dead now but they set such wonderful examples. That's why we're told in Proverbs and Leviticus, we should show respect to the silver-hair because it's a crown of glory and to stand up in the presence of an old man or old woman because they have earned that respect spiritually because of the life they lived. God is concerned with how we end our life, not how we begin our life. God is more concerned how we end our life than what happens in the middle of our life—in our summer—because it's how we end up. What have we done with what we have been given? Christ set the perfect example. He set the absolute perfect example of how we should end one's physical life. What did He do right up to His last breath? He was performing His Father's will right up until His last breath. That example is that we should be prepared to follow in those footsteps. In the winter of our lives, right to the very end, we should be doing our Father's will and being about our Father's business.

Let's summarize now. God designed the seasons for a reason. He designed four seasons physically and I believe there are four seasons spiritually, it's not a coincidence. He wants us to learn from His design. The seasons are here every year, as a reminder and as a measure of where we are and of the progression of our lives, physically and spiritually. It gives us a perspective of where we are in the path of our life. Andy Rooney again said, *I've learned life is like a roll of toilet paper, the closer you get to the end, the faster it unravels*. Boy, that's true. Let's turn to one final scripture, Galatians 6:9. We're familiar with this scripture but it mentions the seasons and until I did research on this subject, it never popped out at me. We're familiar with the first part of this.

Galatians 6:9 *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (KJV)*

The key is, we have the greatest power at our disposal because Christ told us in Mark 10, He said with the world things are impossible but with God, all things are possible. We learn that. God has a purpose for each one of us—Ecclesiastes 3:1, what did we read? Let's end at the beginning.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: (KJV)*

A time for every purpose, a season for every purpose unto heaven, and that purpose is for our being in God's Kingdom. There is a season for our ultimate reward. So let's learn the lessons from the seasons designed by God Almighty.