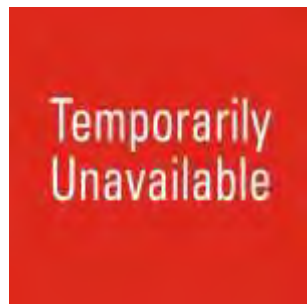


Seasonal living

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April 10, 2015



I wanted to go, but I had to say no.

I was rejecting an invitation to a party celebrating the birthdays of two people I really like and admire. The problem was that this party was starting at 7pm and this coincides with the beginning of my family's bedtime routine. It can take anything between 30 to 120 minutes to complete the process of getting 6 children cleaned and ready for bed. In between brushing teeth, changing into pyjamas, reading a story, tucking into bed, praying, fetching a glass of water, saying goodnight, fetching another glass of water, and finally lying down with

the youngest child who needs my presence to fall asleep, there's a lot of unexpected things that could happen to prolong or interrupt the project. It's tricky enough when both parents are available, but my wife is really struggling at the moment during the evenings when I have appointments outside the home, for the single reason that she's nursing a 1-month old baby. So it was with reluctance that I declined the invitation to the party. I frequently decline many attractive invitations on the justification that I'm prioritising time spent at home with my young family. But do I feel trapped by my circumstances?



This is the reality of my life right now. This is the season in which my wife and I presently are. A few years ago, battling frustration with our limiting circumstances, my wife and I made a conscientious decision to recognise the season in life we were occupying and to accept it. Whenever we hear ourselves wishing for the children to grow up quickly so that we can have more free time, we remind ourselves that this is our current season, and that we should embrace it. So what if the baby is taking up all our time right now? In a few years, we'll be wishing that the baby didn't grow up so quickly! Rather than complaining about all the work

we're obliged to do, we want to be grateful for the privilege of raising children. We know that one day they will grow older; that time will come soon enough. And when that time comes, we will live fully in that season, embracing all that it will bring.

There's a temptation to compare one's own situation with that of other families or individuals. I could feel envious when I see childless couples enjoying holidays and dates together. I wish I could go on many holidays with my wife, or go on nice dates with her. For a long time, we neglected to invest in that part of our relationship, going on a date about once a year. But after participating on the Marriage Course a few years ago, we decided to intentionally make more time for each other, so now we have a weekly marriage night and a monthly date. As for the rest of the week/month, there's still a lot in our current season of life that means that we have to make do by simply loving louder, making an effort to express love and affection through the ordinary routine things we already do.

The author of some Biblical wisdom literature recognised that there's a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). My current season feels like a 'time to plant' rather than a 'time to uproot'. The efforts invested in raising my young family now will (hopefully) yield a harvest of healthy, mature adults who enter the world able to transform it for God's purposes. My season will then change, and it will be a time for something else. At that time, I hope I will live fully in whichever season I enter.

For some of us, we need to make efforts to recognise which season we're in. Some of us might be in the season for weeping or mourning, and to not weep and mourn would be a problem. But when that season passes, we should stop weeping and mourning and begin laughing and dancing, as verse 4 of the above referenced chapter suggests. Some of us might be in a season for listening, for studying and learning and finding out what other people think and feel, and then on that foundation we could enter the season to speak (verse 7) and contribute our own voice to the discussion. God created time as well as space, and whenever we make an offering, the time period of one of the conditions of the offering. It would be good, then, to be aware what time we're in in terms of the timeline of our lives. It would help to reflect on where we've come from and where we're expecting to go. In that light, we can reflect on the season we're in on that journey and behave correspondingly.

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