

an ugly brown bulb in October. Then this bulb is transformed as tiny green sprouts poke through the snow-filled ground in February and March. Gradually these green sprouts turn into red, yellow, pink, and purple flowers. They blossom for a couple of months. Then the petals fall off and the leaves turn brown. Eventually the plant dies and falls back to the ground. Then in six months it appears again, and the cycle starts over again.

Just as there are seasons of the year, there are seasons of the soul. There is a season for emptiness and a season for suffering. We cannot live in a constant spiritual springtime. If we are to have the springtime and the summer with God, we must also have the autumn and the winter. During these times, we can nurture and prepare ourselves for brighter days ahead.

Micah 7:11-20; Psalms 137, 144; Matthew 20:29-34

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Sunday, November 26

Psalm 118 *The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.* (v.22 NRSV)

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” occurs five times in the Bible. Jesus repeats it in three of the Gospels. It occurs again in 1 Peter. Jesus and Peter repeat it because it expresses an important biblical principle. The people that earthly leaders choose in building their institutions are not the same as those whom God looks for in building His kingdom. Those whom earthly leaders reject may even become God’s “cornerstones.” Paul repeats the same idea in 1 Corinthians 1:26-27: “Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.”

Yet, this isn’t always the case. Great Christian leaders, such as St. Francis, sometimes come from wealthy families and affluent circumstances. Others come from poverty and broken homes. You can be used by God regardless of your outward circumstances. “For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Isaiah 19:19-25; Romans 15:5-13; Luke 19:11-27

Monday, November 27

1 Peter 1:1-12 *By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* (v.3b)

When I graduated from high school my classmates voted me “Most Likely to Succeed.” I had also been raised as an active member of the church. I thought I was a Christian, but it wasn’t until ten years later that I came to a redeeming knowledge of Christ.

When you think you’re a Christian, but really are not, it does a couple of things. First, you feel like you’re supposed to have answers that you really don’t. And second, there’s a wide gap between what you know you are deep down and what you feel you’re supposed to be. People sometimes told me what a fine young man I was, but those compliments made me feel uneasy. Deep down, like every other sinner, I felt a sense of shame and unworthiness about myself. I knew that many of the good things people said about me really weren’t true.

Only years later did I discover a new life in Christ. The metaphor of the “new birth” confuses some. Yet, it’s the best available language for describing the new beginning one discovers in making a conscious decision to follow Christ.

Joel 3:1-2, 9-17; Psalm 106:1-18; Matthew 19:1-12

Tuesday, November 28

Matthew 19:13-22 *When the young man heard these words, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.* (v.22)

The rich young man was trying to be ethical and follow the rules. I believe he was sincere when he came to Jesus looking for the way into the kingdom of God. Jesus accurately perceived that first he needed to relinquish control over what was most important in his life: his possessions.

People often come to Christ out of two sets of circumstances. One is a situation of need and great desperation when they turn to God as their only hope. They may have lost their money, a job, or marriage. It’s not as hard for them to give up control of their lives because they feel they have already lost it. The other is a situation of great abundance, often affluence. They begin to feel spiritually restless and realize there is something more to life that they are missing. That was probably how this rich young man felt. Unlike him, however, some are able to relinquish control of their lives and their possessions. In so doing, they discover the riches of the gospel.

Nahum 1:1-13; Psalms 120-123; 1 Peter 1:13-25

Wednesday, November 29

Psalm 119:145-176 *I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in your words.* (v.147)

In my daily time with God, sometimes I look at my prayer list and it seems like I’ve been praying for the same people or situations for weeks. The words I mouth to God seem to have lost their meaning. All I hear in my mind is their clattering emptiness. I began to realize that I did not have to speak to God in order to pray. Why did it seem like such a surprise when I realized that maybe God was trying to get me to be quiet so He could speak to me?

There are not many Christian songs, books, or tapes on silence. It cannot be exploited for profit. Therefore, most of the world, even the Christian world, regard it as meaningless. But you will never hear God if you do not stop and listen for Him. In times of emptiness, put aside your list, your thoughts, and your words, and simply learn to sit in silence in the presence of God. This is also prayer.

Obadiah 15-21; 1 Peter 2:1-10; Matthew 19:23-30

Thursday, November 30

Psalm 133 *How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.* (v.1)

The Yearbook of Canadian and American Churches lists information on more than 200 Christian denominations in the United States. Denominations have split among themselves over every conceivable point of belief. Each tradition undoubtedly feels it has found the best expression of Christianity.

Yet, as far as I know, every Christian denomination practices the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist, or Holy Communion. “I am the bread of life” are words of Jesus that all Christians seem to agree on. In partaking of his body and his blood, Christians find both meaning and unity.

Last week Americans feasted on the abundance of this land in thanksgiving for all it has given us. The word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek *eucharisto* meaning “to give thanks.” Christians give thanks for the bread of life each time they come to the Lord’s table.

Zephaniah 3:1-13; Psalms 131, 132; 1 Peter 2:11-25; Matthew 20:1-16

Friday, December 1

Matthew 20:17-28 *“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.”* (v.26b)

In his book, *A Thinking Man’s Guide to Pro Football*, Paul Zimmerman quotes a physicist who made an incredible discovery. He demonstrated that when a 240-pound lineman running 100 yards in 11 seconds collides with a 240-pound running back at least as fast, the resulting kinetic energy is enough to move 33 tons one inch. Small wonder that football, at various levels, kills 28 players a year and that half the veterans of pro football die before the age of 58. They make a big impact on the lives of others, but it isn’t a life-giving impact.

What about the impact you have on other people? Will it make a difference to anyone else? The only way I’ve discovered to make a life-giving impact on others is to give of your own self. That kind of impact can’t be measured in terms of kinetic energy. But it may be the only way to make a permanent difference. I’m talking about money and time. But most important, I’m talking about giving of yourself. When you give of yourself, you give of Christ and that gives spiritual energy to others.

Isaiah 24:14-23; Psalms 140, 142; 1 Peter 3:13—4:6

Saturday, December 2

1 Peter 4:7-19 *Let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.* (v.19)

The seasons of the year, which are most noticeable in the cold North and Midwest, amaze me. I like to plant tulips and daffodils. I start by planting