



Days of Hope

Perfecting Time Travel

By Jon Wells

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing . . . The writer of Ecclesiastes penned these famous lines more than 2,200 years ago. Much has changed since these words were first inscribed, but this key, timeless truth remains robust.

You, and I, and everyone we know live within the inescapable reality of seasonality. Life comes at us in seasons. So many of us do not recognize this fact until after a stage has passed us by. We fail to perceive it in real time, but our lack of insight does nothing to hold back the tide of the seasons as they wash over our lives. The most obvious example of this truth is the four seasons of the year. With or without my permission, fall is marching interminably towards winter. Beyond the weather, the seasons of our lives are multiple and complex. Raising toddlers is a season all its own. Raising teenagers is another, totally

different season. And without warning, the absence of these children in the home ushers in a completely new stage. We live through seasons in our careers, from different employers to different levels of responsibility to different fields of work altogether. Whether or not we like it, our relationships move through seasons of change. Dating ≠ engagement ≠ newly-weds ≠ young marrieds. (Did you follow that?) Our finances often move through seasons of restriction and plenty.

The children and teens whom I have met in residential facilities throughout Missouri have taught me a lot about how I generally go about interacting with the various seasons of my life. The youth we work with are anxious to escape this current season and pine for the next step. Although the specifics vary with the individual, almost all of them are desperate for that moment when they are discharged from care. Apparently everything is better in the future! The present remains unbearable, and every possible detail is complained about. The food is not to their taste, the staff have multiple shortcomings, the facilities are lacking in some way, and the other kids in their unit are totally unacceptable. Very few of them are able to appreciate much of anything in the present moment. As long as they are caught up in the system, they remain mostly frustrated with it.

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We are currently scheduling speaking engagements. If you are interested in inviting one of our chaplains to come and share with your church, class, or community group, let us know!

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"I just want to be forgiven." The desire for true forgiveness is something that everyone experiences. Carrying the weight of error, bad decisions, and broken relationships can be too much to bear alone. Last week, I visited with a young man who I will call Tony to protect his identity.

As I entered the room, I spoke to the group and asked, "Does anyone needed to speak with the Chaplain?" Tony raised his hand. We grabbed a couple of chairs; sat and talked. Tony has been in the facility for about two weeks and was from out of state.

As we sat, I asked, "How can I help you?"

He answered, "I need prayer for forgiveness." He did not stop there but he continued to say, "I need forgiveness, I want my parents to forgive me and I want God to save my parents."

I sat and just listened to this young man as he cried out for another chance. We know that those who are weary and heavy-laden can find rest in Jesus Christ. Of course, I prayed with him and I also commended him because he not only took responsibility for the wrong he did, but he exhibited an unselfish prayer for his family as well. Even the way in which he went about it was commendable, starting with his desire to get himself right first. This is something that we all can learn; we are not perfect. We as believers need to exercise our liberty to come before the throne of grace seeking mercy and finding grace to help us when we need it. He then requested that his parents forgive him. Realizing that he had hurt and disappointed his parents, he desired to hear it from them.

It is important to forgive others when they have wronged us and also tell them they are forgiven to provide closure. This is often the only way an individual can move forward. Life without forgiveness is a life lived in the past. Forgiveness is one of the first steps of reconciliation.

Let me share this: reconciliation is the fruit of effective intercession. Intercession is performed by Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and all believers throughout Scripture. Jesus is our advocate and intercedes on our behalf to the Father. We are told in 1 John 2:1 that if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The Holy Spirit intercedes for the believers as we do not know what to pray. Beyond that, all believers are told to pray for all people. We are not only to pray for our families as believers, but also for leaders, the unsaved, and those who have wronged us. Reconciliation of relationships was the thing that Tony was seeking.

I request that you keep Tony in your prayers as he seeks restoration with his family. Let's also keep His parents in prayer because it may be difficult for them to completely forgive their son, but with God's help we can have confidence that it is all possible. Something that I believe we can learn from Tony is that we need to reconcile relationships that are broken in our lives. When Jesus laid down his life for our sins, he interceded for us and paid the price so that we may live. Yes, the price that was paid was not cheap for our Lord and it is even the more reason we should forgive, intercede and be reconciled with those closest to us.

Be reconciled and be blessed.

I JUST WANT FORGIVENESS



By Sean A Wilson

These days I am occasionally contacted through social media by adults who once lived in a treatment program for a season of their adolescent life. It is funny to see how their comments are filled with happy reflections on friendships, humor, and gratitude. Last week I brought this up to the girls who had gathered for our campus service- the whole idea was roundly derided. They assured me that none of them would ever express gratitude for this miserable season of their lives. Even as I chuckle over their response, I am taking note of some lessons that they are teaching me about my own ways of living through the seasons of my life.

I often see only the pain and the challenges of my current season. This sad truth invites constant and intentional vigilance. I do not want to be sucked into a black hole of negativity, criticism, and complaint. This path is so common that an entire personality type has been constructed around it. All of us have that friend who has so totally embraced the negativity of their current season that they have transformed into a kind of 'Eeyore,' dragging about and informing anyone who will listen how miserable their life is and why. Such folks have no eye for the good things that come their way in real time; gratitude and joy are difficult to grasp.



I generally romanticize some future season as perfect, if I could only get there. Life will just be better when . . . I get that promotion . . . I move out . . . I finally buy that [fill in the blank] . . . I get married . . . I graduate. So many of us slog through the week, consoling ourselves with the notion that the weekend will be great. We set our eyes on vacations and holidays with the deep conviction that some future moment will make all this suffering worth it. The sad part is that once we finally reach the coveted weekend or holiday, we pretty quickly shift gears and start dreaming of some other future moment of accomplishment or joy. Like teens in a treatment program, we convince ourselves that life will be awesome just as soon as this current discomfort passes.

I am a man out of time, always blind to the season that I am in, always pining for the season to come. I ignore the good in the present. I paint the past with broad strokes of humor and joy, and I spend my hours day dreaming of the magical future moment when everything will be wonderful. I have perfected time travel! My foolish way of living has made it impossible to really appreciate anything in the moment. There is no time available to really inhabit this miserable present moment when it is so fun to relive the amazing past or dream of the fabulous future. Turns out that time travel isn't really that complicated after all.

The great tragedy that you will discover in this form of time travel is the robbery you suffer in the exercise. In spite of our time traveling aspirations, we are only really capable of experiencing life as it comes, in the present. Those of us who choose to waste this precious present moment pining for some other season will be robbed of the only thing we really ever had. This day. This hour. This minute. This second. Once passed, we never have an opportunity to grasp it again.

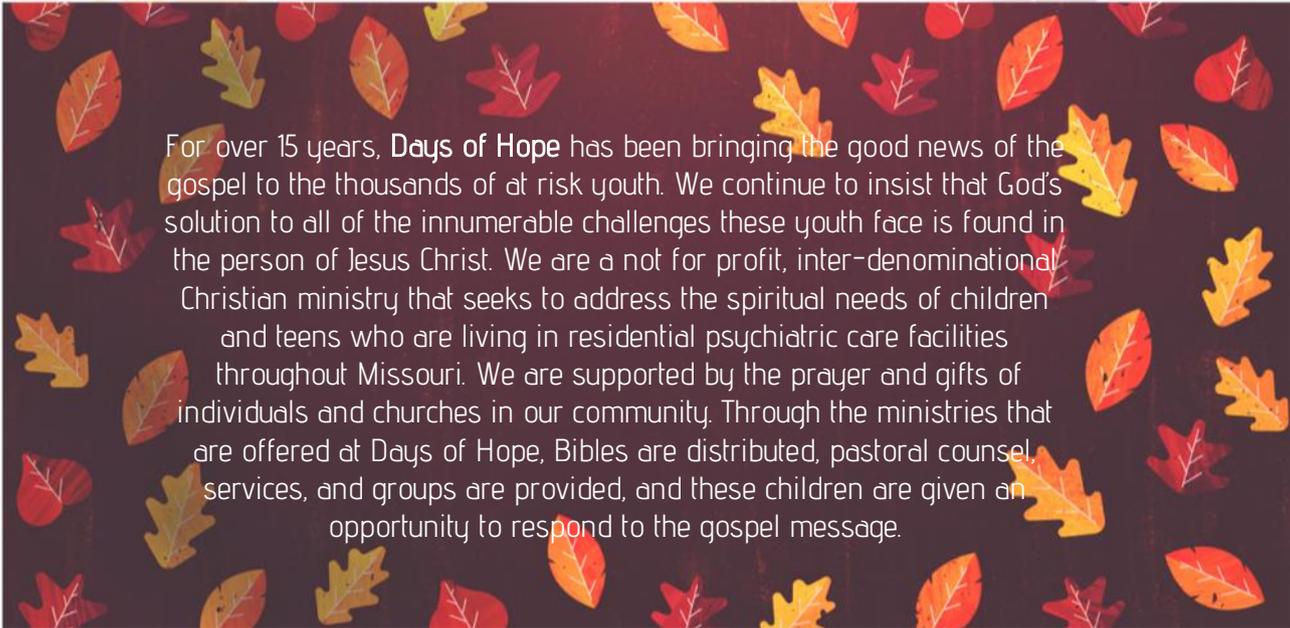
Yes, it is true that this moment is challenging, monotonous, and frustrating in many ways. Perhaps this moment is even painful. Welcome to life! But this moment is also pregnant with joy, discovery, laughter, belonging, and contentment. This is the great challenge faced by every child we minister to in residential facilities- they are finally in a place where the tools and resources are available to them to really help them overcome their challenges. But they so often dismiss every good thing in the present moment and spend their days fantasizing about a gilded past or some rosy future.

I am learning the hard lessons of a seasoned time traveler. We miss out on many things while preoccupied with our mental vacations. The most painful loss is always counted in those we love. How many moments have I squandered, refusing to really engage in seasons that passed so quickly? How many times did I hold an infant while calculating formula and diaper costs and dreaming of a diaperless future? What did I miss in that moment?

These days I am attempting to retire from a remarkable time travel career. I am trying to remain aware of the simple truth that life comes to me in seasons, and that means that this current moment is just that- a fleeting season. I am determined to make the most that I can of the opportunities that this day holds, and look intentionally for the good in the present. It is tempting to abandon the present to criticism and complaint. It turns out that gratitude is a choice, and the old hymn we used to sing is really good advice. Refusing to linger in the past or be distracted by the future, this time traveler emeritus is aspiring to simply 'Count his Blessings' in the moment.

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