

A Time for Everything
January 23, 2022

Scripture Reading: Psalm 16

Most of you will remember a song by The Byrds titled, *Turn! Turn! Turn!* written by Pete Seeger in the late 1950s and first recorded in 1959, the year of my birth. It was popularized and recorded by a singing group named, The Byrds in 1965. The words go like this:

To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together

To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven

A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing

To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time for love, a time for hate
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late

The song is based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, from one of my favorite books of the Bible. I believe I'm in the minority on that account. This message is going to be somewhat unique for me in that it will be more of a testimony about how I've seen these verses come to light throughout the years, than a Scripture teaching.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is a passage about beginnings and endings, new chapters rising and chapters closing, and it's about the transitioning of seasons. It's about changes in direction which is what the phrase, "turn, turn, turn" alludes to; a change in direction. The reason that I chose this passage is that I personally, and our entire church, are in the midst of changes. This message is meant to help us gain some perspective on making adjustments to change for a smoother transition.

In December when the Lord took Vickie to be home with Himself, I lost my wife, my partner, the one with whom I had a covenant love for over 33 years. You lost a friend, a sister in Christ, a Spirit-gifted member of our church. Earlier that same year, we lost our dear sister Linda Cooper. Whether you realize it or not, we are a church in transition. We are a church who has experienced change and change can be difficult.

For me it has been a sobering time of reflection about priorities in life and a time of seeking our Lord about what He wants me to do next in my life. While we should all be doing this on a daily basis to some degree, this is a particularly defined time of change for me.

Throughout our marriage, we were faced with many types of major decisions. One of the first was that we needed to determine whether we would remain in Blacksburg as part of the student ministry or move to Maryland to be part of the community church after I graduated from Virginia Tech. Based on the way that Great Commission Ministries was changing its ministry leadership program and the growing young marrieds ministry at the church in Maryland, God made it clear to us that He was closing the Blacksburg ministry chapter and opening up a new opportunity for us in Maryland, which meant a return to ministry with Steve and Marsha Hogan.

During our time in Maryland, we were involved starting new home groups within the church, as well as joining existing home groups to help them. At one point, we needed to determine whether we would stay with the original Great Commission Church or change our affiliation to a newly forming one which was splitting away from that one. In each of these situations, the Lord would use specific Scripture verses, biblical principles, prayer, and counsel with godly believers we trusted, to give us confidence about which decision was right for us at the time.

Several times, we were faced with needing to decide whether to stay in Maryland or not when my place of employment was closing or I was offered a much better paying job in a different state. During those years, God led us to stay in Maryland with the church and ministries we were doing. He would typically provide a better job for me and allow us to stay in the same home and continue to be involved in ministry with the Hogans.

In 1999, Steve and Marsha and their family moved to Tampa to serve the Great Commission church that was here. They asked us to pray about moving to Tampa to serve in ministry with them and, more importantly, to be able to continue the close friendship that we had shared with them when we were singles and throughout our marriage to that point. That was a very, major chapter closing and chapter beginning to consider. It had lots more impacts than most decisions we had made to that point.

We had many friends and some very close relationships with several other couples which were part of our support network. Leaving Maryland and moving to Florida would mean that we would no longer be able to drive to North Carolina for weekend visits with Vickie's family during a time when her mother's health was in visible decline. On top of that, Vickie had established a network of trusted doctors and surgeons who were helping her to manage her rheumatoid arthritis and surgery plans. Leaving that network had very serious and important ramifications on her long-term health.

We made a list of positive and negative reasons for moving to Tampa or staying in Maryland. It included elements from all of the things I just mentioned - relationships, health considerations, and career ramifications. We got specific Scripture promises about each of the areas, we got counsel about what biblical principles were most relevant like Proverbs 3:5-6 (Trust in the Lord with all your heart...) and Psalm 90:12 (So teach us to number our days...), and, most importantly, we prayed that the Lord would make it clear to us what was the right thing to do. The result was that we ended up joining the Hogans here in Tampa.

God provided a quick sale of our Maryland home and closing on a home in Tampa within one month of finalizing our decision. He gave me a new and better career path than I could have imagined. And He gave Vickie a new network of doctors and surgeons to help her manage her arthritis. They all were very skilled and had excellent insights to help her, so we didn't lose anything in making our transition. Most importantly, we were able to establish new and lasting friendships in the church here, as well as a sense of ministry together.

Since Vickie was having surgery and recovery cycles most years during the past 15 years, we often talked about the possibility of her dying at an earlier age than the average expected life expectancy. That led to a discussion of what I might do in the event that my health was still relatively good when she passed. And that brings us to another major point of change.

My parents are 89 years old and in relatively good health, but my father's health has presented more challenges in recent years. I am their only remaining child and I haven't lived near their home since 1978; that's 44 years. During the 1980's I was involved in student ministry, church planting and, in 1988, got married. When that happened, the biblical mandate was clear - leave your parents and cling to your wife and make your marital needs the focus.

With Vickie's health situation, her health needs became increasingly limiting of her ability to participate in ministry and more demanding of my time to care for her. It was genuinely a blessing to be in Florida, as she was, and therefore we were, unable to handle a more severe climate further north of here. In my absence, my cousins, aunts and uncles have been faithfully helping include my parents in their families' events, as well as helping them with physical needs as necessary. Now that I have the ability to move back north with them, I believe I should recover the responsibility, which my extended family has been shouldering by moving back to Illinois.

One of the issues which Jesus dealt with while hanging on the cross was to make sure that his mother was cared for after His death. He made it clear to them that, in His absence, the apostle John was to care for her like he was her son. Making sure His remaining parent, His mother, was cared for was of concern to Him up to the end.

Paul carries this attitude forward in his first letter to Timothy in chapter 5, verse 8. In the context of caring for the physical family and, especially a widow's responsibility, this verse says, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." These are pretty, strong words! Even the example in Genesis of Joseph making sure that his father was cared for to the end of his life and his bones returned to the land of Israel, demonstrates God's heart in this matter.

While leaving the life we built in Tampa with our closest friends, the church, and the community will be challenging, I am confident that God has made it clear to me that it's the right thing to do. It will be bittersweet. While it will be emotionally challenging for me; circumstantially, He has made it easier for me in several ways.

Our company's North America headquarters where my boss is located is within the same commuting distance as our current home is to my work location in Lakeland. My boss is very receptive, and even eager, for me to transition my work location to there. I already have a buyer for my house and we are working to finalize the contract. Additionally, I have multiple ministry and fellowship opportunities already materializing up north. And I have begun to renew some relationships with relatives and long-standing friends who have become Christian believers since I last lived near them.

So, you may be thinking to yourself, "That sounds like an interesting adventure full of new possibilities for you, but where does that leave those of us who are staying here in Tampa with the same routine? How do we deal with this added loss in friendship and church leadership on top of losing others to death? How do we deal with our loss of what had become familiar and comfortable?"

Maybe this thought will help you: you too are embarking on a new adventure. On both sides, we are all going to experience a sense of loss of close friendships and are encountering a loss of the familiar. The Lord knows how much I've experienced that in the past two months with the loss of Vickie. Everywhere I look in the house are memories of our past 33 years together. And a host of incidents, like thinking that I needed to call Vickie to tell her that I had safely arrived in Illinois during my business trip this past week, are beginning to surface.

As individual believers and as a church, we will need to seek the Lord for guidance about many issues of change with the church and ourselves individually.

With Vickie's and Linda's and my parting, the gifts and ministries that we used and fulfilled here will leave voids. No two people have the identical spiritual gift mix, so the void will need to be filled by a new and unique combination of spiritually gifted saints. Others will need to step forward to fill those gaps or a decision will need to be made about whether what we were doing is still essential. I know that Steve, Bruce and I have already been

praying and talking about this. And we need your help in several ways.

Firstly, we need for you to pray that the Lord gives us His supernatural wisdom to rightly discern what is best for our church in regards to our future leadership, the composition of our ministries and what types and frequency of our gatherings going forward should look like.

Secondly, you should pray to the Lord and search your heart about whether you personally should change what you are doing for ministry. Are there specific needs that you see which you believe you are able to fill? You should mention it to Steve or Bruce. Who knows what form of new ministry may take shape through you.

Thirdly, do you see someone in the church with whom you should initiate being a friend or even initiate showing more concern for so that you can more specifically pray for them? Maybe God wants to give you a new friend or reinvigorate a relationship which has gone stale.

Finally, we all need to comfort one another with the understanding that we have a sovereign God who is directing all that is happening so that His glory will be further adorned by our reactions and that He is willing and able to bring about goodness for us in the midst of these changes. We need to actively pursue asking one another about what losses we are individually sensing and dealing with. We need to imitate the initiating love of God that exemplifies the truth that “we love because He first loved us.” At first, you may not feel comfortable initiating like that, but you need to step out and trust God to work His grace in you.

Remember that we know the God who spoke words of life and an entire universe went from nothingness, total vacuum, into a marvelous physical form full of color and sound and beautiful aromas. Remember that He is the God who says in Isaiah 46:9-10, “For I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all my good pleasure.’”

He is our trustworthy Lord and Savior. Because of Him, we have a good future with hope forever. I will close with one of my favorite lifelong promises from Psalm 27:13-14.

“I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord.”