

Discerning Seasons

Point of the Assignment: 1) To learn that life has phases, which require us to focus our energies more in one area of life than another. 2) To identify your current seasons. 3) To identify where your priorities should be based on your current season.

Introduction

Life is not constant, but rather a cycle of seasons such as with the weather patterns (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, etc.). As humans, our life will experience many seasons where we find our priorities need to be focused on thing more than another, rather than trying to be balanced by juggling many things at one time. Seasons will likely last anywhere from a few weeks to several years.

The challenge many humans face is a failure to recognize that seasons are not meant to last forever, and that when one season ends, that is an indication that a new season is about to begin. For example, when we see the snow on the ground melting, the temperatures rise, and the trees and plants start to bud, we recognize that Winter is coming to an end and Spring is just around the corner; therefore it is time to put away the overcoats and take out the lighter spring wardrobe. This is true of our lives as well. For example as the young person sees the end of their life as a high school student coming, he or she starts to recognize it is time to start thinking about living the life of an adult (school, work, take care of family, self-sufficiency, etc.).

As you are learning, there are many aspects of successful self-direction. One of those is the idea of priority setting. **However, in order to be able to determine priorities, one also needs to first recognize what season of life they are facing, since your season will determine your priorities** (i.e.: A season of "Family First" could mean taking care of small children or focusing on developing a new marriage, or restoring a strained marriage. Thus putting the family first might require that the job or school must wait until one is able devote more energy to it.)

Types of Seasons (can be any combination of the following)

The following list of some common (but not necessarily all) seasons of life that people tend to face. Some of these can be similar and/or interrelated; therefore it is possible to be experiencing more than one at a time. (For example: Someone who loses a job and is unemployed for a while may experience Rest, Breaking, Sacrifice, Survival, Solitude/Isolation, and Introspection all at the same time.)

- **Dependency:** A time in life when it is appropriate to depend on someone else to take care of you, watch out for your best interests, and provide for your needs (birth, childhood, learning, childcare, sick, elderly, etc.).
- **Independence/Self-sufficiency:** A time in life when it is appropriate to assume responsibility for taking care of oneself and not being a burden on others (learning to walk, striking out on one's own, fully qualified and experienced to do one's job, etc.).
- **Care for Self:** There are times in our lives when we are experiencing or recovering from physical, emotional, psychological, mental or spiritual stress (having a baby, injury or

illness, depression, traumatic event, major life transitions, etc.). During these times, we need to spend much more time than normal on everyday activities and/or recovery activities because small/routine activities which normally would require little effort, will likely consume what little energy you do have. During such seasons, caring for self becomes your highest priority, because when you can't function in every-day life, you will not be able to do anything else.

- **Care for Family:** These are times in our lives when taking care of children, spouse, elderly parents or others in need, becomes our highest priority.
- **Learn:** In this season, you are more focused on becoming qualified to do something (*school for basic life skills, college for professional-level profession, internships for real-world work experience, apprenticeships for skilled jobs, study skills class to succeed in college ☺, etc.*) than you are at gaining or achieving Self Sufficiency because of the time, money and energy learning requires. In addition, Learning should take place under the supervision of someone who is more experienced at the subject than you are.
- **Work:** to put most of your energy towards building your life, putting a roof over your head, developing working skills, values, and attitudes, and earning what you need and want in your life.
- **Rest:** Will often accompany **“Caring For Self”**. Typically a person who has exhausted themselves (mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.) from stressful life circumstances (Breaking, illness/childbirth, grieving a loss, etc.), overwork, etc. may need seasons of rest to recover. Also, as humans we are designed to need regular rest periods (i.e. weekends off, vacations, holidays, leave of absence, etc.)
- **Play:** A season of play is similar to a season of Rest, and can sometimes be what someone does during a season of Rest.
- **Sacrifice:** A season of sacrifice is often required when we need to be disciplined enough to give up one thing to achieve another. We need to work for something we value (college or learning, good family life, healthy relationships, buying a home or expensive car, etc.)
- **Survival:** A season of survival is experienced when an individual does not have the resources to meet his/her (or dependents) most basic needs (health, sleep, food, water, shelter, clothing, safety, transportation, etc.). Such seasons are likely rather stressful, and will also likely force individuals to only be concerned with just getting through it. An individual in Survival mode does not have the time, money, interest, or mental/physical energy to think about Play or anything perceived as a non-essential to Survival.
- **Disruption:** A season of disruption occurs when “life as usual” is not the “same old thing” any more. Things around you start to change, and probably in a direction which you don't like. Disruptions can occur in marriage, the family life, home life, careers, place of employment or worship. A disruption can also be in how you view life (i.e. a paradigm shift). A season of disruption might be a clue that a transition is on the way.
- **Breaking:** Seasons of breaking usually occur as a result of either 1) Something important to us is lost (spouse, job, independence, health, home, wealth, relationship, grown children moving out of the house, etc.), or 2) Something occurs to cause us to experience a paradigm shift. Oftentimes that thing lost provided a source of identity, and therefore losing it can be very painful. Sometimes, but not always, these Breaking seasons can be a result of some area of needed character growth (losing job because of excessive absences, spouse leaves because of not being treated right, etc.). Yet other times, we simply need

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to grow in areas of our lives that don't necessarily involve morality ("empty nest", change in priorities, developing gratitude for what we do have, enter the next phase of development, etc.) During a season of Breaking, a person will likely feel as if their life is over (or something equally devastating, and possibly rather humiliated/ashamed over what they have lost if the identity is involved). These seasons cause one to experience a season of Introspection, and can often reveal needed areas of character growth or change. They are often accompanied by Solitude/Isolation and/or Introspection, and followed by Restoration and/or New Beginnings.

- **Solitude/Isolation:** A time of life when we are set aside from our usual activities and life so that we can process things in a new way. These seasons usually are needed transition periods that come at the end of one season, and are designed to prepare us for another new season yet ahead (the old life has ended, but the new life has not yet begun.)
- **Introspection:** A time in life when our primary focus is to stop all other things in our life so we can focus on learning more about ourselves – identity, needs, wants, desires and where we need to go next, etc. These seasons may often accompany as season of solitude/isolation and will likely precede a New Beginning.
- **Restoration:** A season of Restoration is likely to come after a season of Sacrifice or Breaking, where a person has lost things (health, material possessions, financial security, relationships, reputation, etc.), and finds that s/he needs to focus on replacing that which was lost.
- **New Beginnings:** This season is the end of a transition, where one's energy is focusing on adapting to a new way of life (adulthood, marriage, new job, birth of child, retirement, "empty nest", etc.) Such transitions can be disorienting as one learns new ways of thinking, feeling, and doing everyday life. Having too many New Beginnings occurring at the same time can slow down productivity due to experiencing multiple/simultaneous learning curves.

Discerning a Change in Season

Most of the time (but not always) Changes in Seasons can be seen coming:

- **Anticipating Upcoming Change of Life:** These are routine and predictable changes, such as graduations, birth, death, marriage, empty-nest, retirement, etc.
- **Transitions:** *These are similar to Change of Life, but can also include changes that don't necessarily change our lifestyle* (birth of second, third, fourth child, transferring from community college to a university, changing jobs within a career, changing careers within one's working years, etc.). Transitions may or may not be anticipated.
- **Doors are closing:** Sometimes we see that factors beyond our control force us into transitions (spouse demands a divorce, lay off from job, economic slowdown in industry forces us to look for new types of jobs, etc.)

Discerning What Season You are In or Entering

When you recognize that a Change of Season is coming upon you, you can make the process less difficult and painful by accepting that change and responding positively to it. The following are some things you can do to help yourself through a Change of Season:

- **Seek Information:** First thing you should do is understand what is happening to you. As mentioned earlier, people who do not recognize a Change of Season for what it is, are likely to think their life is coming to an end; whereas understanding this will minimize

the stress associated with such changes. The Bibliography on the last page lists several books designed to address various types of Changes of Seasons. Second, when you are able to start thinking about your New Beginnings, you should take the time to find out what options are available to you (For example, someone thinking about going to school should take the time to find out what kind of educational options are available to them.

- **Engage in Critical Thinking:** As you seek information, do what you are learning to do from these exercises: Learn to distinguish the difference between what you learn and how you are responding to what you learn,
- **Seek Wise Counsel:** After you have taken in as much information as you can on your own, then take that information to people who have the wisdom, skills, and credentials to be able to give you sound feedback (skilled helpers, school counselors, therapists, clergy, lawyers, etc.). **At this point, the important thing is to NOT simply do what they say; but rather, take their feedback in as an additional source of information.**
- **Seek Support:** Identify or find individuals in your life who can understand and appreciate that you are experiencing a change of seasons. This individual can be a mentor, someone else who has experienced this season, counselor, clergy, or responsible friend/family. It is important to not try to receive support from someone who does not understand the process, and therefore simply expects you to “Just stop your whining, grow up, and get over it.” People with such attitudes are likely to add to your burdens.
- **Notice Circumstances:** For example, you could be unemployed and truly doing everything within your power to get a job, but the doors are just not opening. This could indicate: 1) You are looking in the wrong direction, 2) You should be **Resting** instead of working, 3) You need to **Learn** new skills, 4) You are facing some other type of transition (retirement, caring for family, etc.), or 5) You are being **Broken** of some bad habit that caused you to be unemployed in the first place.
- **Listen to the Voice Within:** As you process all of the above information, ask yourself what kind of internal response you are receiving from this information. (*i.e.: What is the voice saying to you?*) This internal voice sometimes is the most reliable source of information, but perhaps the one most ignored.

Discerning Seasons – Personal Application

What season(s) of your life are you currently in?

What does your current season reveal to you about where your priorities should be?

How long have you been in this season?

In retrospect, what were the warning signs that this season was coming upon you?

Did you see this season coming?

How did you respond to this changing of seasons? Are there things you could have done differently to better adapt to this change of season?

Can you see a new season coming up in the foreseeable future?

If so, how can you prepare for its arrival? When should you be putting energy into its transition process?

Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

What type of person would need to do this exercise?

How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: (Write down your response after completing this assignment.)

Additional Readings:

Bridges, W. (1980). *Transitions*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

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Hagberg, J.O. & Guelich, R.A. (1989). *The critical journey: Stages in the life of faith*. Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1997). *On death and dying*. New York: Touchstone.

(For Faith-Based Audiences)

Calhoun, A. A. (2005). *Spiritual disciplines handbook*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

Fowler, J.W. (1984). *Becoming adult, becoming Christian*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco. Barnabas.

Morgan, R.J. (2001). *The red sea rules*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Stanley, C. (1997). *The blessings of brokenness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Trebesch, S. (1997). *Isolation: A place of transformation in the life of a leader*. Altadena, CA:

Write, H. N. (2000). *Recovering from the losses of life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Spire.