

Wesleyan/Holiness Women Clergy 2011 “Come to the Water” Conference

Rhythms of Life – Seasons of Change

Prayer Exercise

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Preparation

Choose four people who will pray the public prayer over each season. Give them an advance copy of the script for their particular season so they may familiarize themselves with the sense of that season and the issues faced within it. You may wish to tie each season together with a song. Suggestion: Sing the chorus of “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” after the prayer for each season. Conclude by singing at least the “summer and winter and springtime and harvest” verse and chorus, if not all the verses. Allow at least 20 minutes for the prayer exercise without the song, and at least 30 minutes if you include the song.

Presentation

(Introduce yourself.)

Hear the ancient words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 11:28-30, but spoken today with the voice of Eugene Peterson:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. (*The Message*)

“The unforced rhythms of grace.” At creation, God set in place a rhythm of seasons that we recognize in nature: spring, summer, fall and winter. We often use the seasons as an analogy to describe the physical stages of our lives: spring for the young, winter for the aged. Tonight we're going to use the seasons in a different analogy to describe stages in our ministry life that are not necessarily tied to our age at all, and stages through which we might cycle repeatedly, and not necessarily in a systematic order.

During the next few minutes, I am going to describe a ministry season, and then ask those of you who feel like you are in that season to stand. We want to pray for you. I ask those who are nearby to stand and reach out to the sister in that season, and just begin to pray for her, a couple of sentence prayers. After a few moments of those private prayers, someone will come to the microphone to pray a public prayer for those living in that season. Afterward, you may be seated. We may sing a bit, and then proceed to the next season.

We understand that there may be some overlap from season to season, and as you listen to the descriptions, you may not be sure just where you fit. That's okay. Stand once, stand all four times. We want to pray for you. If you sit out the spring season, and summer and fall, and listen to the description of the winter season, and feel that you still don't fit what is described, that's okay. You may want to stand anyway during that final season, so that we can pray for you also, even in that season that words cannot express.

At this time, I want to name those who will pray the public prayers, so that as the seasons progress, they will simply come without further introduction:

_____ will pray over spring.
_____ will pray over summer.
_____ will pray over fall.
_____ will pray over winter, and over that catch-all season of ambiguity.

* * * * *

II Corinthians 9:8 (NIV): And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

In the **spring**, we have the promise of new life, the budding of new growth, color and fragrance. The full bloom is not yet seen, but the promise is there. The sense of hope fills the air. There is the shaking off of the old, and the stretching out for the new. If you are in this season, your heart is beginning to believe again and your hope is beginning to bud and grow. You sense this change deep within you even though the promise is not yet realized. You do not yet see, but you do believe.

. . . If you are in this spring season, please stand.
. . . Sisters, gather around the one who is standing near you, and begin to pray.

(Proceed with the public prayer, and then the chorus you have selected.)

In the **summer**, the promise of spring has been fulfilled in bright bloom, and we are experiencing the sunny days of freedom and fullness. The skies are brighter, the days are longer, the work is hard, but we are glad for it. The earth seems to rejoice with sounds and smells and sensations that we haven't felt for, perhaps, a long time. If you are in this season, your heart is glad and free. You are seeing with your own eyes at least some of the fruit of your labor in the past seasons, and the fullness of each day is joyous to you. You may be a bit tired, but there is a sense of excitement shining through.

. . . If you are in this summer season, please stand.
. . . Sisters, gather around the one who is standing near you, and begin to pray.

(Proceed with the public prayer, and then the chorus you have selected.)

In the **fall**, the leaves turn color. They begin to fall, and the earth sighs with the change, and the anticipation of even more leaves falling. With each passing day, there is the growing certainty of transition and change. There is a clinging to the days as they become shorter. There is a sense of preparation for the season to come. If you are in this season, your heart is, perhaps, a bit sad, feeling the loss of something, but preparing for the coming of something else. Each day brings you closer to this new something, and may feel a bit heavy since you cannot quite anticipate what lies ahead. For some, harvest is here, and there is much work to do. It is joyous but demanding. For others, there is pruning and cutting and change.

. . . If you are in this fall season, please stand.

. . . Sisters, gather around the one who is standing near you, and begin to pray.

(Proceed with the public prayer, and then the chorus you have selected.)

In the **winter**, there is a stillness, a calm. The blossoms, the leaves and the fruit have all been absorbed. Now there is a covering, perhaps a blanket of snow rather like a veil over it all. It is hard to see anything beneath that covering—when it is light out, but much of the time, it is dark. If winter came upon us suddenly, we feel cold and vulnerable. But for the one who had the opportunity to prepare, there is peace. If you are in this season, your heart may be peaceful and quiet, waiting, patiently waiting. Or you may be impatient, with no sense of understanding of this season at all. You may feel vulnerable, or desperate for warmth and light.

. . . If you are in this winter season, please stand, and if you are in that ambiguous season, please stand.

. . . Sisters, gather around the one who is standing near you, and begin to pray.

(Proceed with the public prayer, and then the chorus you have selected.)

In every season, in every conceivable circumstance or response, the Lord is present: drawing us closer to Him, wanting us to keep our eyes fixed upon Him, the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is faithful and true, more trustworthy than our next breath, more powerful and able than we can imagine in all of the seasons of our lives.

Hear the benediction of Paul from Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV):

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

(Conclude with the full or partial song you have selected.)