

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

March 2017

Lord, Prepare Me to End Well

By: Jon Bloom -
DesiringGod.org



For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted . . . a time to seek, and a time to lose. (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2, 6)

When a new child is born, a new crop is planted, a new project, phase, degree, career, friendship, resolve, marriage, house is pursued, we feel fresh excitement and anticipation. We enter a new season feeling hope about the future. We invest a lot of dreaming, planning, energy, and often money in our beginnings, which explains all the books and videos and coaches offering to help us begin well.

But there is not nearly as

much help available teaching us how to end well. Probably because the demand is much lower. We typically don't relish thinking about or planning for endings, because endings are goodbyes. They are chapter closings that often leave us feeling regret, grief, or confusion over who we are and what our purpose is going forward — or some ambivalent mixture of the above.

Are Beginnings Better?

But the end of a season is often more important than its beginning. When a person dies, we can see much more clearly who they really turned out to be, which is eternally significant. When a crop is harvested, we know what the season and farming diligence actually produced. When a season of life ends, we see, at least to some degree, the true fruit of all our dreaming, planning, labor, and investment.

This is why the Bible says, "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning" (Ecclesiastes 7:8). At a beginning, when we're looking

ahead, we envision a possible future, not a real one. And our vision is always some mixed bag of good and bad motives, love and selfish ambition, serving Jesus and serving ourselves. But looking back, we see reality with greater clarity how various factors — our indwelling sin and Spirit-filled goodness, our strengths and weaknesses, the futility woven into this created age (Romans 8:20–21), and others — affected what we began.

In other words, endings are usually more truthful than beginnings. A review of the day in the evening is more truthful than the caffeinated optimism of the morning's good intentions.

So, why is a sobering dose of realistic retrospect better than a hopeful high of optimistic prospect?

* Because wisdom does not want to build its house on the sand of fantasy. It wants to build on the solid rock of truth.

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ginning, we see our need for a better, more lasting hope than anything we could possibly build here (Hebrews 13:14).

* And because often an ending, more than a beginning, exposes our idols — things or people in which we have placed false hope and from whom we have drawn a misplaced sense of identity.

Endings are often better than beginnings because they more powerfully point us to God as our only hope.

Mentor for ‘A Time to Lose’

For every “time to seek,” there is “a time to lose” (Ecclesiastes 3:6). Learning to end well, to let go well, is one of the most neglected subjects in Western Christian discipleship. There’s little teaching and guidance for navigating these tricky waters. Perhaps it’s no surprise that Christian leaders frequently struggle to step out of leadership, and churches struggle with leadership transitions, and Christians, in general, frequently experience confusion and disorientation at the end of various seasons of life and

ministry.

But God will help us. Oneway to prepare for our “time to lose,” and help others do the same, is to intentionally pray about it. God can make our transition out of a season uniquely powerful in glorifying Jesus.

My favorite model and “time to lose” mentor is John the Baptist. At the end of his season of call, this voice in the wilderness (John 1:23), this second Elijah (Matthew 11:13–14), this greatest man born of women (Matthew 11:11), who blazed across Israel like a prophetic comet, said as he watched his great ministry eclipsed by the bright morning star (Revelation 22:16),

“Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:29–30)

Those words, as much as anything John ever said, revealed the heart that made him so great. He understood what his life was about: Jesus! The beginning of his ministry was about Jesus and, even more so, its end.

And that is what every end of every season of our lives is all about: the increase of Jesus in our decrease.

Whatever It Takes, Lord

There will be a God-given time to exit every role we enter. Some endings will feel sweet and clear; some will feel bitter and confusing. Therefore, it requires a different kind of wisdom to end well than to begin well. It demands Spirit-wrought humility and Spirit-empowered faith to trust God’s sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness in those transitions.

We must prepare for these moments or, better, we must ask God to prepare us, so that as each moment ends, we will say with John the Baptist, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Whatever it takes, Lord, increase my love for your supremacy and my trust in your wise purposes so that, when it’s time for me to step out of something to which you had appointed me for a season, I will receive the decrease in personal influence with joyful faith.

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