

A Harvest Meditation

October 2023

Collecting | Reflecting | Celebrating



Introduction

The Importance of Community

It is good to be together. To share the happiness and beauty fostered as we listen, learn, laugh, and cry with one another. And this togetherness extends beyond a specific place and time because we are linked to each other by the Spirit of God. So whenever and wherever you engage in this Harvest Meditation, you walk with others doing the same as we seek to recognize and respond to God's presence in our lives.

Henri Nouwen offers this wonderful image of the community we share: "In true community we are windows constantly offering each other new views on the mystery of God's presence in our lives. ... Community thus is obedience practiced together." (*Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*, p.87) Even more, God asks us to consider "how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV) In our culture of connectedness, that encouragement can happen in many ways, from in-person conversations to virtual touchpoints, all of which can prove meaningful and God-honoring. So in the varied ways we assemble and interact with this meditation, we trust God to continue the good work He has started, and will complete, in each of us.

Why Gather in the Autumn Season?

Fall can be a frenetic season of re-starts and fresh beginnings as the casual feel of summer tightens into a disciplined schedule of tasks and responsibilities: carpools, practices, lunch making, homework, youth group, small group, evening meetings and so much more. Yet the



fall season also offers good things like apple cider, frosty mornings, the color-burst of foliage, and the harvest of food for our tables.

As autumn settles in and our involvements increase, let's also make room to intentionally pause and reflect. To ponder the preceding year, gathering not only what has grown in the farmer's field and our backyard gardens, but also in our souls.

Coincidentally, the Christian liturgical year is also drawing to a close, with the new year starting again the first Sunday of Advent. It's fortunate that here in the Northern Hemisphere the liturgical year aligns with the agricultural harvesting season. So as we collect and gather and feast and celebrate the end of the growing season, autumn is an appropriate time to do the same with our spiritual lives. In fact, perhaps it makes better sense to initiate commitments, changes, corrections, etc. during fall than at the New Year as the growing season concludes and we engage in a harvest, both real and spiritual.

Therefore, through this meditation you're invited to pause. To assemble with others or in a quiet space by yourself to spend time **collecting, reflecting,** and **celebrating** God's presence and activity. To look back at your life to consider conversations, experiences, joys, and heartaches that have formed you over the past year.

This process may take some time. It's recommended you reserve blocks in your schedule to work through the three sections below, perhaps doing each on separate occasions. Just like harvesting from our fields takes time and effort, so does gathering a spiritual harvest from our lives.

Collecting

The Seasons of Life

Our lives are ever changing, having moments of joy and sorrow. Laughter and pain. Triumph and failure. In a word, our life consists of **seasons**. Just like the calendar seasons bring variation in daylight, precipitation, and temperature so too the seasons of our heart have unique characteristics and purpose.

In an agricultural context, seasons contribute to the overall health and vitality of a living thing. In a similar way, each season of life is necessary for spiritual formation and growth. Even in difficult times, we are undergoing transformation. In his book, *Spiritual Rhythms*, Mark Buchanan says: "Fruit grows in seasons, and all seasons are necessary for growing it. And seasons are as much about what is not happening as what is. It has as much to do with inactivity as with activity, waiting as with working, barrenness as with abundance, dormancy as with vitality." (p.18)

Using this seasonal framework, below is a guide for your **collecting**. Through it you'll progress through the seasons in this order: winter, spring, summer, fall. Begin by reading the



description of the spiritual season, ponder the associated passage of Scripture, and then follow the prompt. Write or draw or in some way note anything that God brings to you as you open your mind to the memories of the past year in the context of each season.

It is recommended that you spend at least one hour in a quiet, undisturbed place to collect. Ask God to bring to mind whatever needs further examination, contemplation, and prayer. Do your best to gather all that the Spirit brings – the joyous and the unwelcome. While some things are difficult to acknowledge and accept, all of your experiences are part of who you are and given to you by God. Write down what comes to mind without commentary or editing. Simply collect.

As you collect, keep in mind the characteristics of the season from a spiritual perspective, not the actual season on the calendar. However, if during the past year you did not experience the spiritual season as described, look back on your living during the actual season, asking God to help you collect from your life during those months.

To assist with your collecting, below is a prompt you can use as you work through the seasons. Use this same prompt for each season.

Prompt for each season: Reviewing the past year, was there a time when you were in this spiritual season? Spend a few minutes in prayer, collecting from this season what God brings to mind (e.g. people, a place, feelings and emotions, an experience, a relationship, conversations, decisions, accomplishments, mistakes, disappointments, pain, joy, etc.). If you did not experience this spiritual season during the past year, look back on your life during the actual season on the calendar and collect from those months.

A Prayer for Collecting

*Watchful, gentle, and merciful Lord,
my shepherd through seasons of life;
Unveil what has passed through a lens of your love
as I harvest the field of my soul.*





Winter

Description

When your heart is in the season of winter you might feel abandoned, alone, and weary. You may lack desire, with your life seeming a bit aimless. Winter can be a season of death, when the things that used to give you pleasure are not attractive. Mark Buchanan suggests, “Winter is when your heart is so closed up you can’t imagine it ever opening again, your dreams so buried you can’t conceive of them resurrecting.” (*Spiritual Rhythm*, p.37) Winter is often the longest season in which you are pruned and refined by God, who may seem both distant and near, yet yet inaccessible because “Winter hides God.” (p.35)

Scripture

Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 (NIRV)

1 Remember your Creator.

Remember him while you are still young.

Think about him before your times of trouble come.

The years will come when you will say,

“I don’t find any pleasure in them.”

2 That’s when the sunlight will become dark.

The moon and the stars will also grow dark.

And the clouds will return after it rains.



Spring

Description

Gladness, joy, and hope-fulfilled will characterize you when you’re in the spiritual season of spring. Typically coming after time in the winter season, spring brings renewal out of dryness, death or crisis. A springtime of the spirit is filled with restoration and renewal. It’s a season of sanctification and preparation for what’s to come. “Jesus reserves his deepest intimacy for winter. But he displays his greatest handiwork in spring. He brings living water into thirsty lands, emotional strength to faltering hearts, physical wellness to the sick and the lame.” (*Spiritual Rhythm*, p.82)



Scripture

Isaiah 35:1-2 (NiRV)

1 *The desert and the dry ground will be glad.*

The dry places will be full of joy.

Flowers will grow there.

Like the first crocus in the spring,

2 *the desert will bloom with flowers.*

It will be very glad and shout for joy.

The glorious beauty of Lebanon will be given to it.

It will be as beautiful as the rich lands

of Carmel and Sharon.

Everyone will see the glory of the Lord.

They will see the beauty of our God.



Summer

Description

Author Mark Buchanan asks, “How do you know you’re in summer? Simply, things *flow*. Your life is marked by effortlessness. Fruit comes easily. Joy rises naturally. Light shines everywhere. You have energy to spare. Most seasons of our hearts demand something from us, some sacrifice, some labor, some deep wrenching adjustment. But summer just wants to give and give. Its only demand is that we surrender to it, bask in it.” (*Spiritual Rhythm*, p.113) Summer is a season of warmth, rest, play, wonder, holiday, and reunion. When your spirit is in summertime, you are neither worried nor hurried but have a sense of satisfaction.

Scripture

Psalms 65:9-13 (New Living Translation)

9 *You take care of the earth and water it,*

making it rich and fertile.

The river of God has plenty of water;

it provides a bountiful harvest of grain,

for you have ordered it so.

10 *You drench the plowed ground with rain,*

melting the clods and leveling the ridges.

You soften the earth with showers

and bless its abundant crops.



11 You crown the year with a bountiful harvest;
even the hard pathways overflow with abundance.
12 The grasslands of the wilderness become a lush pasture,
and the hillsides blossom with joy.
13 The meadows are clothed with flocks of sheep,
and the valleys are carpeted with grain.
They all shout and sing for joy!



Fall

Description

The spiritual season of fall is a time of anticipation, “and that anticipation – joyful, dreadful, eager, resigned – has much to do with how we have stewarded our other seasons.” (*Spiritual Rhythm*, p.152) Fall is a time for reckoning and harvesting. It’s feasting and thanksgiving as you reap what you’ve sown in your life, and in the lives of others. And what you gather, you store for the present as well as the future. Fall is a time to look back on what you planted in the season of spring and consider how you can plant and sow in ways that honor God’s work in you, and among those around you.

Scripture

Galatians 6:7-10 (The Message)

7-8 Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest.

The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.

9-10 So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

Pause

Before moving to the next stage of **reflecting**, take time to rest. Notice any feelings or emotions that have presented themselves as you collected. Ask the Spirit to direct you toward anything you might need to tend to right now before continuing. Also consider whether it's best to stop here and come back another time to begin reflecting.



Reflecting

Now that you've done some collecting, it's time to reflect upon what you've gathered.

What Does it Mean to Reflect?

The idea of reflecting is a multi-faceted concept. From a literal standpoint, the word reflect has the notion of mirroring or bending back to look again. It can also mean to give back or reflect something back to someone.

For example, each day you likely have the common experience of seeing your reflection in a mirror. The light that shines upon you is bent back toward you by the mirror. You receive that bent-back image of yourself. You take it in, perhaps admiring the view. Or maybe you're disappointed and take action with some adjustments. Whatever your reaction, you have an opportunity to respond to the reflection.

The Purpose of Reflection

As you bend back and see again the people, events, and circumstances of the past year, you open yourself to recognize God's involvement and activity in ways that you may not have otherwise in-the-moment. While time often fades memories, it can also lend perspective. In addition, for those experiences where you did have a tangible sense of God's presence and care, reflecting in the present might reveal a new understanding, feeling, or connection with God not previously available to you.

Let's also admit that sometimes reflecting can be difficult as you revisit a painful, traumatic, frustrating, or disappointing circumstance, event, or relationship. Acknowledge that reality and invite God into those difficult memories. Be honest – with yourself, and with God – about how you feel. And then invite the Holy Spirit to guide you into healing and growth and a deeper trust in God's good work.

As you look at all you've collected and written down as part of the "Collecting" section of this meditation, it might seem overwhelming. One place to start reflecting is to consider the spiritual season you're in right now (winter, spring, summer, fall). Reflect on that season, or pick one season you've experienced this past year that you're feeling prompted to spend time with. You might also choose to narrow in on something very specific. This exercise of reflecting should be Spirit-led and personal to you.

In the weeks to come as we prepare for Advent, consider making space for additional times of reflection and prayer over the season(s) you experienced this past year. This process of collecting and reflecting from your life will take time, so ask God for patience and wisdom with the right pace.



Below are some prompts to assist with your reflection. Even more than these prompts, ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time. Pray for an openness to recognize God's presence and your experience of Him in those moments you're bending back to revisit again.

Reflection Prompts:

- Is there something I'm being invited to explore, try, stop, or modify?
- Was there a unique thread woven throughout this season that I'm being invited to follow?
- What did I learn about myself?
- What did I learn about God?
- Is there someone I need to forgive?
- Do I need to repent and seek forgiveness from someone?

A Prayer for Reflecting

*Spirit of God hover over me now,
Shield me from whispers of fear;
Quicken my soul to be eager and brave
as I humbly receive what you give.*

Pause

Before moving to the next section of Celebrating, take time to rest. Notice any feelings or emotions you had or are having as you've reflected. Ask the Spirit to direct you toward anything you might need to tend to right now. (e.g. confession, repentance, forgiveness) Perhaps a prayer walk would be appropriate, or just an extended time in contemplative prayer, resting in God's peace.

Celebrating

Walking through life's seasons, it becomes clear that life is strung with tension, stretched between hope and disappointment. Pain and pleasure. Joy and sorrow. Even so, the primary response to God in all things should be gratitude.

In your collecting and reflecting on life's circumstances, the Spirit reveals to your mind and nurtures in your soul God's touches of grace. These actions highlight the psalmist's words, "Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you." (Psalm 116:7)

As you consider the past year, can you say that God has been good to you? If so, open your heart and release your praise! Yet, let's not ignore the deep trials and struggles that can suffocate our spirits. If it's simply too difficult to have a celebratory spirit right now, that's okay.



Don't ignore or repress your emotions and feelings. Bring your hurt, pain, and tears to God, being honest with Him. He sees you, loves you, and is with you.

Similar to the suggestion above for ongoing reflection in the weeks leading to Advent, consider writing a summary of this past year. Write it in whatever form you wish: memoir, a letter or prayer to God, a travelog through the seasons, a poem, a short story, etc. If inclined, you might paint or sketch or create some type of visual expression that captures the spiritual seasons or a particular season that is very present to you. Or maybe you create a song? Consider using this focus on celebration to reaffirm, adjust, initiate, etc. in your relationship with God – similar to what's typically done at the New Year.

A Prayer of Gratitude

*First of firsts and Creator of all,
All that I have comes from you;
I submit myself to be formed through life's seasons,
grateful You're with me each step of the way.*

Contemplative Closing

The harvesting of crops is anticipated and necessary. The same is true of a spiritual harvesting that gathers from your lived experience. As you've brought this past year into the present, your reflecting, nourishing, celebrating, and grieving will continue, just as food from the agricultural harvest continues to provide sustenance and growth during the coming months.

Whatever season you're in now, or will be soon, it's good to know that you are seen and known and loved by God. That you can surrender yourself, allowing Him to gently, but firmly, form you through the seasons of life into a person that thinks, acts, and speaks more and more like Jesus. This is neither a simple nor pain-free process. Yet it is good, especially when you release yourself fully to that process, relinquishing any desire to control your situation or circumstances.

Finally, below is a link (and lyrics) to the song "Light of Your Love" by the group Young Oceans. Perhaps you will find some restful encouragement as you listen and consider adopting a spirit of "wild abandon" as God lovingly shepherds you through the seasons of life.



Young Oceans | “Light of Your Love”

Music video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBsrKPH-n4M&list=PLsR8y0U0tzBxCmGfPrAN4vwN7uX6Yo2GY&index=3>

Lyrics

In the light of Your love
So pure and so clear
There’s nothing I want
And nothing to fear
You tell me that I
Am free as a child
I’ve nothing to fear
In the light of Your love

In the light of Your love
My heart is Your home
Never abandoned
Never alone
You tell I’m Yours
Shielded and sure
My heart is Your home
In the light of Your love

I wanna live in wild abandon
I wanna know the heart of heaven
I wanna see with eyes from above
In the light
In the light

Will You open
Open up my eyes

