

The Rhythms of Life



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Genesis 1, Gen. 8:22, Ps. 90:10, Job 1:13–19, Acts 9:1–22, Phil. 1:6, Rom. 8:1.*

Memory Text: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven” (*Ecclesiastes 3:1, NKJV*).

Some of the most beautiful poetry ever penned came from King Solomon: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose 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 kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (*Eccles. 3:1–8, NKJV*).

Those words capture so much of human existence—the seasons, the rhythms of our lives. Yes, our lives go through stages, through changes, and they do so from the moment we are born. Sometimes the changes are good, sometimes not; sometimes we have control over them; sometimes not. This week let's look at the seasons and rhythms of our lives, especially as they impact us and our families, too.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 6.

In the Beginning

The Bible begins at the beginning, which is no doubt why it begins with the words (actually one word in the Hebrew) “In the beginning . . .” (*Gen. 1:1*). The particular focus of the chapter, of course, is the transformation of the earth from a state of being “without form, and void” (*Gen. 1:2*) to the world that God Himself, on the sixth day, declared “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). In short, the beginning here is the beginning of our world.

Read Genesis 1. Though so much is going on, ask yourself the question: Is there any hint of randomness or chance, or is everything done in a very orderly manner, with everything in its proper time and place? What does your answer say about the character of God?

Ellen G. White wrote that “order is Heaven’s first law” (*Signs of the Times*, June 8, 1908); apparently it is on earth, as well. Though sin has disrupted the natural world, to some degree, order, rhythm, and regularity still exist.

Read Genesis 8:22. How is order seen here, as well?

Even after the Fall, the seasons come and go in an orderly fashion—generally. Hence, along with the lights in the sky (i.e., the sun and moon, which are to “‘divide the day from the night . . . for signs and seasons, and for days and years’ ” [*Gen. 1:14, NKJV*]), there are the seasons, as well, all part of the natural rhythm of the world that God has created. And, though we get only glimpses now, a verse such as Isaiah 66:23 implies that in the new heavens and new earth the sense of rhythm will, indeed, exist then, too.

Think about how the Sabbath, in a powerfully regular way, impacts your life, especially your family life, whatever it is. What are the distinct advantages, not just of the Sabbath, but in the fact that it does come with such regularity?

The Rhythms of Life

Scientists talk about something called circadian rhythms, the idea that there are biological rhythms (sometimes called “body clocks”) that regulate function in our bodies. In other words, a certain degree of regularity exists even within our bodies themselves. Hence, to some degree, rhythms exist all around and even *in* us.

What are the predictable seasons of life mentioned in the following passages of Scripture, and how do they directly tie into family life?

Eccles. 3:2 _____

Gen. 21:8, Judg. 13:24 _____

Ps. 71:5, Prov. 5:18 _____

Gen. 15:15, Judg. 8:32 _____

Ps. 90:10 _____

Between the two bookends of life, birth and death, we all go through a variety of seasons, different for each individual. Some children don’t live long after their birth; others grow into adults who live to a ripe old age. Children grow and develop at their own rate. Some walk or talk sooner than others. Some will be able to attend school and grow up to be professionals, while others will devote their time to other forms of work. Some will have families, and others may never marry or have children.

There are billions of people on earth, and though we all have much in common (*see Acts 17:26*), each one of us is an individual, and thus, differences will exist in each one of our lives.

In a sense, too, these differences are important because they make each one of us unique, which means each one of us has something to share that others don’t have. In short, our differences allow us to be a blessing to others. For instance, both young and old can benefit from what each offers the other: “The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head” (*Prov. 20:29, NKJV*). Whatever stage we are in, and no matter our differences, we all have something to offer, not just to the Lord but to each other, as well.

Whatever your life circumstances happen to be right now, what can you do to be a blessing to someone else? Why not make a conscious effort to be that blessing, especially to someone in your family?

The Unexpected

Read Job 1:13–19, 2:7–9. What happened to Job? In what ways does his experience reflect what happens to everyone, in one way or another, or at one time or another?

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus declared that “there is nothing permanent except change.” Just when it seems that everything is going fine, the unexpected happens. It may be the loss of a job or a limb, an illness that sends us to bed or to an early death, a house fire, a car accident, a fall while walking the family pet.

Of course, not all changes have to be negative. Maybe a promotion at work leads to better economic conditions. Or perhaps you meet someone who will become your spouse, a change that many would welcome.

Either way, we can be going along, even in a routine, a rhythm, when, instantly and unexpectedly, it’s all disrupted.

Job was certainly not expecting the new season in his life. The Bible describes him as a man who was “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (*Job 1:1, NKJV*). Also, we know that he was married, had seven sons and three daughters, and was very wealthy (*Job 1:2, 3*). By the time we reach the middle of the book, he has suffered at least six major losses: his property, his labor force, his children, his health, the support of his wife, and the encouragement of his friends. His world has been turned upside down and his family life devastated.

Though what happened to Job was quite extreme, who among us hasn’t experienced the unexpected in a very negative way? Life can be going along just fine when, suddenly and without warning, everything completely changes, and our lives—and our family’s lives—might never be the same again.

This is nothing new. Abel probably didn’t expect to be murdered, and Joseph didn’t exactly expect to be sold into slavery in Egypt. In both stories, family members were the betrayers, and in both stories the families were greatly impacted by what happened to the other members. Scripture is full of examples of people whose lives, and families, were greatly transformed by the unexpected.

How has your faith helped you amid the trials that unexpectedly interrupted the rhythms of your life?

Transitions

The fact is that human beings are often creatures of habit. And we do, indeed, get set in our ways, and the older we get, the harder it is to change those ways.

Indeed, we don't change easily. How many wives have complained over the years, "I've tried to change my husband, but . . .?"

However, God is in the business of changing us, if not so much our personalities, certainly our characters. That's so much of what the plan of salvation is about: God making us into new people in Him.

What great change happened to Saul of Tarsus, and how did it happen? *Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1–22; Gal. 1:15–17.*

"As Saul yielded himself fully to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he saw the mistakes of his life and recognized the far-reaching claims of the law of God. He who had been a proud Pharisee, confident that he was justified by his good works, now bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child, confessing his own unworthiness and pleading the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. Saul longed to come into full harmony and communion with the Father and the Son; and in the intensity of his desire for pardon and acceptance he offered up fervent supplications. . . .

"The prayers of the penitent Pharisee were not in vain. The inmost thoughts and emotions of his heart were transformed by divine grace; and his nobler faculties were brought into harmony with the eternal purposes of God. Christ and His righteousness became to Saul more than the whole world."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 119, 120.

Even if our own conversion stories are nowhere near as dramatic as Saul's, we should all have our story, an experience of how the Lord has worked in our lives to change us, to make us into the kind of people we know we should be. Yes, the process can be long, and at times it's easy to wonder if we are ever going to change. At times like these, two Bible texts are so crucial to meditate on and to claim for oneself.

Read Philippians 1:6 and Romans 8:1. What two great promises are found in those texts, and how do they fit together in the experience of a Christian?

Interactions

The Bible is a book of relationships. God created us to be in relationship with others. Indeed, very few of us live in complete isolation. For starters, none of us could even come into existence but for others. Even after birth, we need others to take care of us, at least until a certain age when, in principle at least, we could exist on our own. And even if we could, who would want to? Most of us need and crave the company and companionship of other human beings. Though pets, such as dogs, can be delightful companions, in the end the deepest and most meaningful and life-changing interactions come through other people. No wonder, then, that the family, and family relationships, are so crucial to our existence.

Because most of us do interact, often all the time, with others, these interactions can and often do impact the changes and rhythms of our lives. They work two ways, though: others, in their interactions with us, impact our lives. We, meanwhile, in our interactions with others can impact their lives. And whether we realize it or not (and many times we don't), those interactions, in either direction, can be either for good or for evil. How crucial then for us to be proactive at all times, so that our inevitable influence on others is always for the good, especially on those with whom we are closest, which are usually our own family members.

Read the following texts. What do they tell us to do in our interactions with others? *Rom. 15:7; Eph. 4:2, 32; 1 Thess. 3:12; James 5:16.*

In many ways, the principle is simple. If we act nicely, kindly, and compassionately toward others, we will be a positive influence upon them, even to the point where we could change their lives in a very positive way. Just as Jesus changes people's lives in a very positive manner, what a privilege for us to do something similar for others, as well. Again, we must remember: our influence is going to be either for good or for evil, even in subtle ways. And nowhere is this influence, subtle or not, more pronounced than in our families.

Look at the two following statements of Jesus: Luke 11:34 and Mark 4:24, 25. What are they saying about the importance of how we interact with others?

Further Thought: Imagine the changes that occurred in the life of Christ's disciples as they spent time with Him. They were mostly uneducated, simple people, accustomed to the teachings and traditions of their Jewish faith, but now they were being challenged by the Galilean Rabbi. They experienced jealousy (*Matt. 20:20–24*) and conflict (*John 3:25*); they seemed to lack faith (*Mark 9:28, 29*), and they even abandoned (*Matt. 26:56*) and betrayed Jesus (*Matt. 26:69–74*). At the same time, they were growing spiritually so that people recognized Peter had been with Jesus (*Matt. 26:73*), and even the members of the Sanhedrin marveled when they perceived that Peter and John were “uneducated and untrained men. . . . They realized that they had been with Jesus” (*Acts 4:13, NKJV*).

Think, too, about the incredibly positive impact we could have in our families if we lived in such a way that when other members of our family see us, they know that we have “been with Jesus.”

What do these words from Ellen G. White have to say about influences in the home? “The home may be plain, but it can always be a place where cheerful words are spoken and kindly deeds are done, where courtesy and love are abiding guests.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 18.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. What are these verses saying, and how can you apply the principle there to your own life and experiences?
- 2 In class, talk about some of the life-changing experiences that you have been through, and talk about the lessons you learned and, if applicable, the lessons you *should* have learned. What did you learn from the lessons that you didn't know? Also, talk about how these life-changing experiences impacted your family. What lessons did you learn in these situations, too?
- 3 What are the ways you live today that, were it not for Christ in your life, would be radically different from what they are now? What should that tell you about the power of Christ to change us?

Missionary's Joy Journal

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

The year couldn't have gone worse for Elisa Albertsen, a native of Palmer, Alaska, who quit a promising career as a hairdresser to volunteer at a mission school in the Marshall Islands.

Just three months into the school year, she had to be airlifted back to the United States after dislocating a kneecap while playing soccer at Ebeye Seventh-day Adventist School.

After four months in the United States, Albertsen was still recovering and realized that she would have to break her promise to her students to return before the end of the school year.

Then she and her longtime boyfriend broke up.

Disappointed and discouraged, Albertsen decided to take a 40-day fast from secular music, books, and movies and to immerse herself in the Bible and the writings of Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White. It was then that she started a joy journal.

"I wanted to count 1,000 gifts God gave me," she said.

The daily entries in the joy journal began with simple things. Albertsen wrote that she was grateful for clean water and the sunlight shining through the window. As she continued to write, she remembered the words of the apostle Paul, "Rejoice always" (*1 Thessalonians 5:16, NKJV*).

When she discovered ants swarming over the food in her dog's bowl, she thought, *This is so frustrating. I hate ants!* Then she remembered the joy journal and, peering closely at the busy ants, marveled at their perseverance, teamwork, and ability to carry a load many times their size.

In her joy journal, she wrote, "I thank God for ants. Through God, we can accomplish things that are much bigger than us."

Albertsen also found joy in other negative circumstances. When someone criticized her, she wrote, "Thank You for that critical word because it puts me on track to improve and draw closer to You."

She thanked God for her dislocated kneecap, realizing He strengthened her mentally and physically through the injury.

Albertsen is now 21 and back at Ebeye as a second-grade teacher. She pulled out the joy journal after catching a flu going around the island.

"When I lost my voice, I said, 'Praise God because now I can hear my children better,'" she said.



Part of the second quarter 2018 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped the Ebeye Seventh-day Adventist School carry out repairs on crumbling classrooms. Thank you for your mission offering.

Part I: Overview

To live is to experience change. From the beginning, God's perfect Creation included cycles and seasons (*Gen. 1:14, 2:3*). The weekly Edenic cycle that culminated in a seventh-day Sabbath thankfully punctured through to the post-Fall era and apparently will continue indefinitely in the new earth (*Isa. 66:23*). Even after sin, our lives continue to flow according to cycles of all kinds: environmental, biological, relational, familial, emotional, and even political (*Eccles. 3:1–8*). God knew that a static life would be so banal as to be unbearable, so He ordained rhythm and change to be integral to His creative order.

Changes can be unexpected or anticipated, positive or negative. They elicit from us a spectrum of responses that range from joy to sorrow and everything in between. This lesson explores how individuals are susceptible to life's phases, especially in the context of families.

Job's life illustrates radical and unexpected change. Joseph's life falls into the same category. Though their respective families were significantly transformed in tragic ways, the end of Job's and Joseph's stories displayed a God of redemption and restoration. Narratives such as these offer us hope in God's providence and inspire us to remain faithful through phases of difficulty.

Our relationships and the specific kinds of interactions they engender also play a key role in our lives. Consider the immeasurable influence parents have on children. The course of our lives is often set, whether for good or for bad, by those first family relationships. If our early family life has been less than ideal, healthy relationships can help undo past negative influences. Meeting Jesus later in life can revolutionize a life to the point that a person is called a "new creation" (*2 Cor. 5:17, ESV*).

From all this reflection, a quasi law of influences emerges that states that all interactions we have with others can be for good or for evil. This realization should cause us a measure of pause before we impulsively or flippantly engage family, friends, or strangers. We are making a difference in their lives whether we are aware of it or not.

Part II: Commentary

Illustration

Being around young children, one quickly realizes the difficulty of communicating time intervals. My wife and I faced this challenge raising all three of our daughters. How do you answer such questions as "How long

till my next birthday?” or “When can we go to the park again?” when time intervals are not fully grasped? I’d answer my youngest, “We’ll come back in a week,” and she’d say, “How long is that?” We soon discovered that “Sabbaths” were the answer to our dilemma.

Cyclic Sabbaths in our home were filled with a sundown Sabbath candle ceremony, Sabbath School, church, potluck, and friends. This created a memorable time reference for our children so that we would answer time questions in Sabbath units (e.g., “We’ll be at Grandma’s in three Sabbaths”). This worked like a charm. In addition, I was pleasantly surprised that our family Sabbath “trick” was embedded into the language of biblical Greek.

Not too commonly known is that the Greek *sabbatōn* in the New Testament refers not only to the seventh-day Sabbath but also can denote a week (*Matt. 28:1, Luke 18:12*). In fact, there is no Greek word for “week” in the New Testament other than *sabbatōn*. I admit I was rather excited that our family’s substitute of “Sabbath” for “week” was biblical!

God’s weekly Sabbath turned out to be our children’s first clock. The Sabbath is more than just another day that pops up every week. It is a spiritual reference point in time by which to calibrate the rest of our lives.

As an important side note, there is at least one translation of the Bible (A. E. Knoch’s Concordant Version), and a few Christian ministries, that do not recognize *sabbatōn* as referring to the week. This practice may seem inconsequential at first, but it leads to a textual argument for calling “Sunday” a “Sabbath.” In keeping with this line of thinking, Matthew 28:1, consequently, uses the expression “*one of the Sabbaths*.” Thus, the first day of the week, Sunday, is called a sabbath. Only context can determine whether “Sabbath” or “week” is intended. Thankfully, just about every recognized English translation renders *sabbatōn* correctly as “week” in Matthew 28.

For those grammatically inclined, the phrase in question, in Matthew 28, literally reads *mian* (first) *sabbatōn*. But there is no gender agreement between *mian*, which is feminine, and *sabbatōn*, which is neuter; therefore, “first” cannot modify *sabbatōn* but instead modifies the assumed feminine noun *hemera* (day). This syntactical construction is similar to our saying, “I’ll see you on the fourth.” The word “day” is assumed. Therefore, reading the text as “the first day of the week,” as opposed to the awkward and ungrammatical “the first day of the sabbaths,” is clearly the accurate translation.

Theological Insight

It has been observed that the way the Sabbath cycle originally began illustrates an interesting key principle of the gospel and of the character

of God. Usually, we think of the Sabbath as the end point to a long busy week and, thereby, reinforce a work-rest cycle in our own thinking. The Sabbath commandment certainly is framed as such (*Exod. 20:9, 10*). However, from an Edenic perspective, the cycle is reversed. It is true that *God* worked all week and then rested, but humankind was not created until the sixth day (*Gen. 1:27, 31*). Basically, within hours of being created, Adam and Eve entered into the Sabbath. Their first full day was a Sabbath day of rest. For them, the Sabbath was hardly a rest from a long arduous workweek. Their work didn't begin until *after* they had rested, and therefore a rest-work cycle is a more nuanced representation of the Sabbath cycle. God worked during Creation week, and humans rested *in* His works . . . and afterward, they went about their own work (*Gen. 2:15*).

The theological parallels are plain. God accomplished the works of salvation through the saving life, death, and resurrection of Christ; we rest from any of our own "works" in honor of Christ's saving achievements (*Heb. 4:9–11*). Once that salvific rest is fully experienced and embraced, our own works of loving and gracious obedience can follow. How wise of the Creator to weave an analogy of the plan of salvation into the fabric of time through a weekly Sabbath.

Reflection

The lesson brings out two broad themes titled "The Unexpected" and "Interactions." A fruitful discussion for the class may be to ask: What "interactions" in Joseph's family create an environment in which the brothers' behavior is actually not that "unexpected"? The concept of parental favoritism emerges as a generational problem, or cycle, among the patriarchs—one that had devastating family consequences. "Now Israel loved Joseph." We wish the text would have ended there, but sadly it continues, "more than all his children" (*Gen. 37:3*). We wish the brothers were ignorant of their father's favoritism, but they weren't: "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him [Joseph] more than all his brethren, they hated him" (*Gen. 37:4*). Jacob was most likely influenced by the favoritism he received from his mother and saw in his father toward Esau (*Gen. 25:28*).

All the pain, jealousy, and guilt created by this family's dysfunctional dynamics stand as a continual rebuke of family favoritism. If Jacob would have identified and broken with the partiality displayed in his own upbringing, he possibly could have spared his own family such tragedy. God, in contrast, is the quintessential Father who "shows no partiality" (*Rom. 2:11, ESV*). Even though Jacob's family was a mess in many respects, this same Father God was able to bring about one of the most

miraculous and enduring stories of triumph. There is hope for us yet and for our families.

Part III: Life Application

It is easy to think that the way things are now is the way they will be in the future. Job and Joseph woke up on their fateful mornings just as they had every other day. But everything changed in a moment, as it can with us. Being prepared can determine whether life's changes work for our good and spiritual maturity or whether they crush us and throw us into a spiritual tailspin. So ask your Sabbath School class what we can do in the present to respond in a godly way to inevitable change. Here are some ideas linked to the lesson:

- 1. Get into a rhythm. This expression is used when something becomes so familiar and regular that we do it without thinking. Job prayed the moment his life changed forever. No doubt Joseph did too. The rhythms of life can become manageable when we've already adopted a rhythm of prayer with God.**

- 2. Sabbath renewal is never far away. Just as prayer is untouchable by outside forces (you can pray in a prison), the Sabbath can never be taken from you. The Sabbath is secure behind the unassailable bars of time. You can be sure of a rendezvous of rest with Jesus every Sabbath day no matter if the world is imploding all around you; that is, you can have this assurance *if* you have gotten in the habit of spending the Sabbath with Jesus now.**

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3. Be the transitional character that Jacob wasn't. We often take the family baggage we received from our parents and unintentionally pass it right along to our own children. Instead, with God's wisdom and transforming power, we can be what family therapists call a transitional character—"one who, in a single generation, changes the entire course of a lineage. The individuals who grow up in an abusive, emotionally destructive environment and who somehow find ways to metabolize the poison and not pass it on to their children. They break the mold."—Randal D. Day, *Introduction to Family Processes* (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), p. 116.
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4. Learn your Bible stories. It may seem simplistic, but it is still too easy to think that our lives should somehow go more smoothly than the lives of the patriarchs, prophets, and disciples (and the life of Jesus, for that matter). The more time we spend in the Bible, the more our perspective will change and the less we will think some "strange thing" is happening to us in times of difficult change (*1 Pet. 4:12*).
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