



Since I have been living in Spain, knowing the summer season is an easy task. The summer has temperatures of 35-40 degrees with zero precipitation during the months of June, July and August. In comparison, when I was living in Scotland I couldn't distinguish the summer season by whether there was rain or not – it was a constant companion! Seasons are part of life in the natural and each one has its own beauty. So it is in the spiritual realm.

The bible encourages us to discern the seasons. Ecclesiastes tells us, “there is a season for every activity under heaven.” For example Jesus said to the disciples “lift up your eyes to see the fields, they are white for harvest.” So obviously they were in an autumn season of fruit gathering. As soon as Jesus had been baptised, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus was entering a winter season of aloneness in the wilderness for testing. When the Pharisees were comparing the fasting of the disciples of John with the feasting of the disciples of Jesus, he responds, “it's not time to fast when the bridegroom is with you!” They were in a springtime season of joy and celebration.

So let me ask you a question. What season are you in? If a farmer was asked the question he wouldn't hesitate to answer. Why? Because every particular season is linked with specific jobs to be done and his whole year has a rhythm. We don't want to be gathering fruit when actually it's time to sow. We don't want to prune when new life and blossoms are just appearing. There is a proper order and one season follows the other. So it is spiritually. If you are in a pioneering season and desperately needing some roots to go down and see the establishing of the ministry, then throwing more vision at the staff isn't necessarily helpful. Similarly, spending time feasting, avoiding difficult questions and acting as if everything is fine, isn't helpful when you are in a plateau and moving towards decline.

People want to know what season we are in and what season we are heading for. Here are some seasons for you to consider – not an exhaustive list by any means but a start to get you thinking. Let's look at some seasons Jesus went through and apply them to our own lives.

- 1. Preparation/Waiting Season:** *The test of patience and the danger of loss of passion.* Jesus knew his calling as the Messiah but there was a right timing and so he had to wait. He knew John the Baptist had to emerge first to prepare the way. Jesus in the meantime worked as a carpenter with his father. Thirty years he waited, without getting frustrated. He knew God had a specific time and was patient for that time to come to pass. This season isn't always easy. Some jump into action without allowing the foundations of prayer and personal preparation to be laid properly. Others are happy to wait but struggle to then move into action.
- 2. Pioneering Season:** *The test of faith and the danger of presumption.* Jesus began his ministry preaching a fresh message of the Kingdom. He brought revelation of what the Kingdom was all about and called disciples to follow him and become a part of it. It is a time to cast vision and recruit followers to form teams, to explore together, to do new things in new ways and see things brought to birth. It is an exciting time, a honeymoon phase where faith is active, prayers are answered and measurable progress is made. For

some this is a scary season and for others it is the best time of all. This is a vital time to experience but we can't stay in this season.

3. **Growth Season:** *The test of adaptability and the danger of over control.* After the shock of seeing miracles and the ministry approach of Jesus towards women, children, the uneducated and the religious leaders, Jesus and the twelve got into their rhythm. They travelled the length and breadth of the country ministering in the synagogues, attending public luncheons, seeing multitudes healed and ministered to, then going on retreat together before the whole cycle restarted. Month by month the news of Jesus spread more widely and more people were reached. The core team of followers, ready for anything grew to 120, with many thousands whose hearts were open and warm towards him. The real growth season was to start after Pentecost when 3000 were saved but this was harvest time and everyone was having fun. This phase is exhausting but exhilarating. It's a time when outreaches are seeing people saved, students and staff are increasing, new locations are opening up, new ministries are emerging, leadership training is effective, relationships are broadening in the nation and there is a growing influence. The challenge is to keep this season going for as long as possible!
4. **Settling/Consolidation Season:** *The test of systems and structure formation and the danger of losing the apostolic vision.* In the book of Acts we see the 12 beginning to develop a structure for the early church. Meetings from house to house, large meetings at the temple, the elders delegate authority to resolve the problem with the Hellenistic Jews, they send teams to reach out to towns outside Jerusalem and ministry to the Gentiles is clarified. In the midst of it all, the danger was that they would lose their pioneering vision for the Kingdom. Paul had to confront Peter regarding coming under the rules and regulations of the Jews and councils were set up to come to decisions on important matters. This is an important season where systems are put in place, there is a new need for order and job descriptions or outcomes are developed for all the established roles. However it can lead to decline if the original vision is hazy.
5. **Plateau Season:** *The test of perseverance and the danger of not giving room for fresh vision.* There comes a time where there is a standstill in terms of vision, growth and morale. Things have levelled off. The ministry is simply existing rather than developing and nothing terribly exciting is happening. The machine is working and functioning but there seems to be a lot of hard work for little progress. This is the next step to the settling season if no fresh vision and apostolic leadership is given. To come out of it, there needs to be hard questions asked and a seeking of God for the right people and the right plans to be laid out and implemented.
6. **Transition Season:** *The test of dependency on God and the danger of loss of morale.* The ministry of Jesus went through several transitions. Initially it was just Jesus preaching and doing the miracles. Then came a time when he asked his father who should join the team and 12 were added. He focused specific time with the 12 disciples from this point. Then came another transition where he met more closely with Peter, James and John. We don't read how the disciples react to this but there is certainly some discussion over who is the greatest! Transitions can cause insecurity and so we have to be very sensitive and have a clear process through these times as communities. Transitions are caused by all manner of things – the loss or change of leadership, the change in a ministry location or ministry structure or ministry approach or the change of season in the ministry. All these take much prayer and thought and care.
7. **Decline Season:** *The test of honesty and the danger of negative shame.* We don't like to talk about it or sometimes even admit it but openness and honesty is of vital importance here. If there is a decline in any way, we need to gather the team and ask the question

“Why?” Is this of God, of the enemy or of ourselves? John the Baptist asked the question when his ministry seemed to be declining and his disciples were leaving. His response was to close the ministry down and declare, “I must decrease and Jesus must increase”. So it was God’s time to close the ministry down and he responded in the right spirit. So if our ministry season is ending, we need to finish graciously. If we need help to resurrect it then it’s time to give a Macedonian call and put the right strategies in place.

8. **Dark night Season:** *The test of calling and the danger of giving up.* The night Jesus was betrayed and taken to trial seemed unreal to the disciples. “How could this be happening?” they thought. Everything they had believed in and hoped for was now in question. They all ran from the garden of Gethsemane that night and then met in secret to commiserate with one another. It seemed like the end. They couldn’t see light at the end of the tunnel and so they went back to Galilee to fish – only to discover they couldn’t even do that and caught nothing. We all have moments like these, or seasons that can last years where we don’t know what we are doing or where we are going. This is where we need to depend on the last thing God gave us and hold on to the vision and the promise he has given, because one day it will be fulfilled if we don’t lose heart.
9. **Evaluation/Assessment Season:** *The test of reflection and the danger of insecurity that wants to avoid it.* There was a time when Jesus preached a hard word of commitment that caused some of his disciples to leave. There was an evaluation in the team and Jesus asked, “Will you leave too?” As teams, communities and ministries we need to have regular evaluation times that help to clarify where we are, what season we are in, and what we need to do about it. It’s a time of soul searching, a time of analysis as to what’s working and what’s not, where our strengths and weaknesses lie, what leadership style is necessary and what strategies need to be put into place.

So, back to the question that I asked you earlier. What season are you in - as an individual, as a team, as a church, as a family? It may be that different ministries you are involved in are in very different seasons. The important thing is that we understand what season we are in and then we can face the challenges more objectively. Every season is just that – a season. It doesn’t go on forever. There is a beginning and a transition into a new season. So, I would encourage you to take some time to ask the Lord and clarify what season you are in right now. Then ask, how can I gain the maximum in this season, and is there someone to relate with to help bring further understanding. What dangers should I be watching for and what strengths can I develop in the process?

Whatever season you are in, make the most of it.

Until next month..

Stephe

Stephen Mayers
Regional leader YWAM Western Europe
Chairman YWAM Europe