

# *Necessary Endings*

July 8, 2018

**Worship Songs: Made New & Resurrecting**

**Drama: Terminal Visit**

**Feature: We Are Never Getting Back Together**

Good morning everyone.

In the third chapter of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes we read:

*For everything there is a season,  
a time for every activity under  
heaven.*

*A time to be born and a time to  
die.*

*A time to plant and a time to  
harvest.*

*A time to kill and a time to heal.*

*A time to tear down and to build  
up.*

*To cry and to laugh.*

*To grieve and to dance.*

*A time to scatter stones and a  
time to gather stones.*

*A time to embrace and a time to  
turn away.*

*A time to search and to give up,*

*To keep and to throw away,*

*To tear and to mend,*

*A time to be silent and a time to  
speak*

*A time to love and to hate,*

*A time for war and a time for  
peace.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NLT)<sup>i</sup>*

What I want to talk to you about today (as you might have guessed from the drama and

the song) is the dark side of that little biblical poem:

- When it's time for something to die, to be torn down, to be scattered or thrown away, to be killed off.
- When it's time to give up; to turn away from instead of embracing.
- When it's time to say “‘We as we’ – the way we are right now – are never ever, ever getting back together. This pattern of interaction we have, this cycle of behavior we're in and maybe even this entire relationship or association ... *is over.*”
  - I'm not talking with you anymore.
  - I'm not fighting with you

anymore.

- I'm not living with you anymore.
- I'm not working with you (or for you) anymore.
- I'm not bailing you out anymore.
- I'm not covering for you anymore.
- I'm not tolerating <X> anymore.

Have you ever been in a situation where an “ending” of that nature seemed like it would be such a great relief but ... you just couldn't bring yourself to do it?

- You rehearsed the speech over and over in your mind but when the moment came, you couldn't get the words out.
- Or whenever you thought about bringing things to an end, you felt

guilty because you were being judgmental or disloyal or unloving.

- Or you told yourself that if you gave the person or situation “just one more chance” maybe things would get better.
- Or you decided that the unknowns of life on the other side of “the end” was too scary or too painful.

Having been a pastor for many years, I’ve seen all of those scenarios play out again and again in the lives of people who have been part of this church.

Not only that, many of those same scenarios have presented themselves in my own life both personally and professionally; times

where I knew it had become necessary to look at someone and say “that’s it. We’re at the end of this” whether “this” was a fruitless conversation or a series of antagonistic interactions or even a job.

And through all of those experiences – both yours and mine, I’ve realized that the great struggle we have (especially if we are Christians) is that *we want to make sure we’re doing the right thing.*

More specifically, we want to follow the way of Jesus and the Kingdom of God; the Kingdom which exists not just in another dimension (“Heaven”) but right here and right now alongside all other kings and kingdoms; a Kingdom in which the way of the world is turned upside down; a Kingdom ...

- Whose citizens are called to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile
- Whose citizens are to avoid being judgmental and condemning of others
- Who are instructed to forgive others just as God has forgiven them
- Who are told to love their enemies by praying for them and “doing good” to them
- Who are called to endure hardship and persecution

With a core value system like that, the very thought of turning away from a person or a difficult situation is hard to reconcile.

But that’s what we have to do sometimes because the truth is ... there is a time for every purpose, including this one. There are

times when endings are necessary.

The question is “when?” And then “how?”

## **A Big Misconception**

But, before we get into that, I think it will be helpful to spend a few minutes clearing up a huge misconception about Christianity that exists in the minds of many who follow Jesus (as well as those do not).

And here it is:

**The Way of Jesus is “all grace all the time” (where “grace” in this case means *tolerance*)**

In other words, “If you really know Jesus and you’re serious about following Him, then you will be tolerant of any and every



behavior or situation. You will let people do whatever they want to you, you will put up with every circumstance, because you are – *like Jesus* – first and foremost, a servant.”

And we are. We’re servants. It’s not about us. It’s not about our “rights.”

*However*, grace is not the equivalent of tolerance. Grace means giving people more than they’ve earned and treating them better than they deserve in spite of what they’ve done ... which sometimes *does mean* tolerating their behavior or hanging in there a little longer in a bad situation.

But not always. Not even Jesus did that.

As we saw in our “This Is Jesus” mega-series earlier this year, Jesus did and said things

that no one had done or said in Israel for centuries; things that people had only heard about in the stories of Israel's prophets.

And they wanted in. They wanted to be part of His movement – at least, as they understood it.

**That's why one of his friends wrote this:**

*Because of the miraculous signs  
Jesus did in Jerusalem at the  
Passover celebration, many  
began to trust in him.*

**However, John continues ...**

*But Jesus didn't trust them,  
because he knew human nature.  
John 2:23-24 (NLT)*

In other words, He knew that some would

try and manipulate him for their own purposes, so He put up a stop sign. He set up a boundary that limited how much they could interact with him.

And not only them; sometimes He even did it with those who were part of His inner circle.

Once, when Peter argued with him about his “strategic plan” (which was to go up to Jerusalem to be crucified instead of seizing power over the political, economic and religious institutions) ...

**... another of his friends tells us that ...**

*Jesus turned to Peter and said,  
“Get away from me, Satan! You  
are a dangerous trap to me. You  
are seeing things merely from a*

*human point of view, not from  
God's."*

*Matthew 16:23 (NLT)*

In other words, “Peter, as long as you are attempting to dissuade me from what I’m supposed to be doing, you’re acting like the devil. And ‘we as we’ are never ever, ever getting back together unless you change your point of view” ... which, as the story goes, Peter eventually did.

Furthermore, this philosophy and practice of “intolerance” was characteristic of Christians all over the Roman Empire for decades after the time of Jesus. However, in the typical upside-down style of the Kingdom of God, it wasn’t towards *outsiders*. It was towards *insiders*.

**For example, the Apostle Paul told the**

## followers of Jesus at Corinth ...

*You are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.*

*1 Corinthians 5:11 (NLT)*

Not long after that he wrote to a young pastor who he was mentoring.

*Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. Titus 3:10 (NIV)*

In other words, “Titus, if people who claim to be Christ-followers are causing trouble within the congregation, make it clear that

their troublemaking needs to end or their relationship with the church will end.”

**And he told another group of Christians to ...**

*Keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” 2  
Thessalonians 3:6,10 (NIV)*

In other words, “if healthy, able-bodied men and women among your number choose to sit around and gossip instead of working, don’t provide for them out of your HOPE fund. Let them go hungry until they are ready to earn their keep.”

And there are many other examples we could look at but, hopefully, that's enough to make the point which is that ...

**The Way of Jesus is *not* “all grace (tolerance) all the time” ... because sometimes *people need more than tolerance.***

Sometimes people need to know that there is an end coming to their current reality *if things don't change* ... which, if you think about it, is also grace – just in another form – because its intention is the same: to bring about something good and beneficial in their life.

## **Signs of the Time**

So, with that cleared up (hopefully), we can look at the first question: *how do you know*

*when an ending of some sort is necessary?* How do you know when it's time to stop ...

- Talking or fighting with someone
- Living with or working with someone
- Bailing them out; covering for them
- Tolerating them or a situation

There are lots of signs – lots of indicators, but I'm going to limit my answer to just four that have been helpful in the past to me, personally, and what I've observed in others.

And I'm not saying that any single one of these is reason enough on its own to bring about an ending but I will say that if two or three of these describe your situation, it's time and maybe even past time.



So here we go.

**Sign #1 that it might be time for an ending is when the situation goes from “doable hard” to “destructive hard” and stays there.**

Now, no one ever said life would be easy. In fact, on many occasions, Jesus told his followers it would be just the opposite!

For example:

- “In this world you will have trials and tribulations.”
- “You’re not going to be sheltered from the storms of life.”
- “Sometimes, you’ll even be reviled and abused because of Me.”

Life is going to be hard sometimes because

that's just how it is for everyone.

**However, Jesus *also* said ...**

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ... For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.” Matthew 11:28,30 (NET)*

Point being ... there's a difference between the burdens that life randomly deals out and the burdens Jesus expects us to take upon ourselves. If a burden comes from Him, he says, we'll be able to bear it. It might be hard but it will be *doable* hard and not *destructive* hard.

What's the difference?

When something is *doable* hard, it might require all the energy you have, but there are breaks where you can rest and replenish. And you can come back at it again and get through it again.

When something is *doable* hard, it feels plenty difficult in the moment but there's also an underlying joy because you're sense you're making a positive contribution; that good things are happening because of your efforts. And when it's over you look back at what you went through and you feel good about it.

But *destructive* hard is when you go *beyond the energy you have* to the point ...

- Where you simply are not able to give what is required.

- Where you don't have the emotional, physical or financial reserves.
- Where you don't have the skills or wisdom that's required.

*And yet you continue to try to make it work to the point ...*

- Where your heart, mind, soul, body (and maybe your bank account) are totally drained
- Where you feel beaten down and wonder if maybe you're going crazy
- Where you're bitter and angry at everyone, including God
- Where there is no joy in anything (or your joy is coming from people and places it ought not to come from).

That's what "destructive hard" looks like

and feels like.

And when you're there with a person or a situation, I'm pretty sure it's not God's will for you. That's not the kind of yoke Jesus puts on His followers.

Now, having said *that*, I should also say that the problem might also be that you're too weak.

In other words, you might have a grace deficit in your own life and you might need to work on your heart and do what we talk about all the time around here: *stay filled with the knowledge and experience of God's grace to you in Christ*. Become so conscious of what He has given to you (and is giving to you every day) that you are filled with joy and grace and you can give it away cheerfully.

But sometimes, it's *not* you that's the problem. Sometimes, the person or situation is so draining for so long that you can't keep filling up fast enough. Sometimes the person or situation simply requires more than you can give.

And that's sign number one that some kind of ending might be necessary: when things move from *doable* hard to *destructive* hard and stays there.

Here's another one ...

**Sign #2. You constantly carry the load that belongs to someone else.**

When that happens, it's a sign that some kind of ending might be necessary.

Now, a lot of Christians are confused about this and for good reason. As I said at the beginning of this message, we're called to help others in need as Jesus has helped (and continues to help) us.

### **That's why Paul writes ...**

*Carry each other's burdens, and  
in this way you will fulfill the law  
of Christ.*

*Galatians 6:2 (NIV)*

In other words, by helping others you'll be doing the main thing Jesus said His followers are to do – which is to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

**But a few verses later Paul also writes this:**

*Each one should test their own*

*actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else for each one should carry his or her own load.*  
*Galatians 6:4-5 (NIV)*

Which sounds totally contradictory!

Which is it Paul? Are we supposed to carry each other's burdens? Or are we supposed to carry just our own burden?

Here's the deal.

The first part of what we Paul is saying has to do with when a person is in the ditch; when a person is suffering and needs someone to come along and help because they are unable carry their own load. When that happens, if we have the capacity and it's not destructive hard, we jump in and we



help them. We provide a temporary solution to a temporary problem.

But the next part of what Paul is saying (“each one should carry his or her own load”) has to do with a permanent pattern of life. And that pattern is “you are to be responsible for you. You have certain things God has told you to do and I have certain things that God has told me to do ... and I don’t need to do yours and you don’t need to do mine. Each one should carry his or her own load.”

Now, here’s the thing that we so often miss: when I constantly take responsibility for stuff you ought to be doing, what am I communicating?

That it’s OK to be irresponsible. In fact, I am

*enabling* you to be irresponsible.

And, friends, enabling bad behavior on your part is not good behavior on mine and we both need to end that little dance.

One of the biggest mistakes so many people of my generation made – and I know it came from a good-hearted motivation – was not teaching our kids to carry their own load. As a culture, we were always jumping in and doing things that kids could and should do themselves. We were always covering for them or bailing them out when they messed up.

That's why there are so many 20-somethings and 30-somethings today who are simply lost when it comes to things like managing money, handling interpersonal

conflict, sticking to a commitment, and, in some cases, literally carrying their own load ... of clothes ... to the laundry!

And I don't say that to be critical of *them*. I'm being critical of *us* – my generation.

**I like the way Henry Cloud talks about this in his book *Necessary Endings*. He writes:**

“There is a difference between helping someone who is disabled, incapable, or otherwise infirm versus helping someone who is resisting growing up and taking care of what every adult (or child, for that matter) has to be responsible for: herself or himself.”

“When you find yourself in any way paying for someone else's

responsibilities ... you are probably harming that person.”

And it's also a sign that it's probably necessary for an ending of some kind – maybe not of the entire relationship but certainly of the *pattern* of that relationship.

Here's another one ...

**Sign #3. When reality is that more effort is not going to bring about a different result, an ending of some kind is probably necessary.**

Now, the problem with this one is that just because it's the reality of the situation doesn't mean we see it or allow ourselves to see it. Sometimes we want things to work so badly that we ignore the truth about the person or persons we're struggling with.

Jesus once gave His followers a very strange and cryptic instruction in this regard.

**He said:**

*“Do not give dogs what is sacred;  
do not throw your pearls to pigs.  
If you do, they may trample  
them under their feet, and turn  
and tear you to pieces.”*

*Matthew 7:6 (NIV)*

Now, when He said this, Jesus wasn't talking about *literal* dogs or pigs. He was actually talking about *people* which, in our culture sounds totally offensive, but in His ... they immediately understood what He was saying because one of their proverbs said “as a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool returns to his or her folly.”

If you have a dog, you've seen that happen, right? It throws up and then what? Licks it up.

It's gross but that's what dogs do. Whatever they ate made them sick but they turn right around and eat it again.

And a foolish person is just like that. They do something yucky that messes up their life and the lives of others ... and then they do it again. And again. And again. They never change. It's gross but they keep doing the same yucky things over and over.

Now, here's the truth that we sometimes don't want to admit. *Some of the people in our lives are not wise. They are foolish.* And you have to treat them differently from everyone else.

So, how do you know the difference between a wise person and a foolish person?

I love the way Cloud explains it.

**When “the light” comes into the life of a wise person, they’re thankful and they adjust their life.**

In other words, you give them feedback, you try to help them, and *they listen* to what you’re saying. They consider it carefully and they apply it to their lives.

Now, they may not enjoy the feedback at first but they don’t see you as “the enemy” who is out to get them. Instead they believe the best: that you are someone who has their best interest at heart.

**On the other hand, when “the light” comes into the life of a foolish person, instead of adjusting themselves, they try to adjust the light.**

When you give them feedback or try to help them, instead of listening to you and trying to see if there might be any truth in what you are saying, they deny and deflect. They make excuses. They shift the blame.

Sometimes, they even accuse *you* of being the real problem. And instead of trusting you as someone who has their best interest at heart, they make you out to be an enemy whose only intention is to hurt them.

Now, here’s the point: *spending more effort on someone like that will not bring about change.*

That’s what Jesus is saying. He’s saying



“don’t trust someone like that with the best of your efforts because they will not value you and they’ll maybe even hurt you in the process.”

And when the light comes on for *you* – when you realize that this is what you’re doing with someone in your life, that’s a sign that it’s time for something (either the pattern or the entire relationship) to end.

Ok, one more sign ...

**Sign #4. When you fear for your health and/or your safety an ending of some kind is almost always necessary.**

I’m sure you heard about the situation a week ago in Annapolis, MD, where a guy shot and killed several staff members of the local newspaper.

The saddest part about it (at least to me) was that one of the reporters who was killed had said at one point, “this guy is the kind of guy who one day is going to try to kill us.” He had a sense that he was in danger. And he was right.

Truth is ... not only are some of the people in our lives wise and some foolish, some are also evil. The Bible says that they're so given over to anger and bitterness that they have learned to love the darkness and hate the light.

So when the light comes into their life – when someone says “hey, that’s not right” or “what you’re doing is really painful to me” – they don’t try to adjust anything. Instead, they try to destroy the light and

whoever is bringing it.

And when that happens or, and this is so important, when you begin wonder if it might happen, you need to run. Now. You need to put an end to the physical proximity in that relationship.

Call the police. If you're a woman who is being abused, call Synergy House. Call us. Get protection physically and legally if necessary.

## **What Now?**

So, those are at least a few of the signs that it's time for some kind of "ending" with a person or a situation.

- When the situation goes from "doable

hard” to “destructive hard” and stays there.

- When you constantly carry the load that belongs to someone else.
- When it’s true that more effort is not going to bring about a different result
- When you fear for your health and/or your safety

So, how do you actually do it? How do you move towards an ending?

Four things, very briefly (and these obviously don’t apply to a situation where you are in danger. In that one the move is running and getting protection).

**1. Don't go it alone. Pray and, if necessary, get support from a friend or trusted advisor.**

Pray that God will break through to the person or situation so that change becomes possible. And pray that you'll have the wisdom and courage to do what needs to be done.

And when you talk to someone else it's not to gossip. It's to get support for doing what needs to be done.

**2. Invite change and explain the consequences of not changing.**

Again, I like the way Cloud describes this. He writes ...

“With any kind of problematic behavior of a person who is not taking

feedback and ownership, the need to do something about it must be transferred to that person, and that is done through having consequences that finally make *them* feel the pain instead of others. When they feel the pain, they will feel the *need* to change.”

For example ...

When a spouse merely says to the alcoholic, “you need to go to AA,” that is obviously not true. The addict feels no need to do that at all. That’s why they’re not.

But when a spouse says, “I am moving out and we are not getting back together until you are getting treatment for your addiction,” that’s when the addict feels “I need to get some help or I am going to lose

my marriage.” The need has been transferred.

If that happens ... then the next thing is to ...

**3. Insist on a *process* and *progress* not just a *promise* of change.**

In a relationship with someone who has a history of letting you down, promises mean nothing in terms of the future. What you need is to see is verifiable involvement in a proven change process which includes things like ...

- Admission of need to change
- Additional structure
- New experiences and skills
- The presence of support

- Skilled help
- (Last but not least) Some success

And if that – a process of change – doesn't happen then it's time to ...

#### **4. Follow thru on consequences if necessary.**

It's time to bring about the necessary ending for the benefit of everyone involved.

Let's pray together.

**Feature: Brave**



## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

“A really, really big thing is happening here next week ... check it out!”

### **Video Clip – 2018 Movie Series Promo**

Rick Blessing –

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face to shine upon you

And may you not be timid or fearful but filled with the power, love and self-discipline that comes from God’s Spirit.

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<sup>i</sup> I’ve shortened this passage a bit for the purposes of public reading.