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The Inner Journey

In his journey to list the seasons of life, the writer of Ecclesiastes throws this one in...

There is a time to kill and a time to heal. Ecclesiastes 3:3

Since this section of scripture was originally written in Hebrew, and we now have it translated into English, perhaps it would be helpful to know what the original Hebrew words meant. The Hebrew word used here for "heal" means to mend, to cure, to repair, make whole, heal, or physically cure. The Hebrew word used here for kill means to smite with deadly intent, to wound.

What kind of things do we need to kill? We need to kill the things which are enemies of our spiritual, mental, and emotional health. Learning to identify what things need to be killed is the tricky part. Our discernment is not always perfect.

Dying to our flesh and living unto Christ means killing the things that take our away our breath and our ability to breathe in the life-giving spirit of Christ.

For example, when I struggle with judgment, unforgiveness, bitterness, malice, etc., these are things I need to deal with. They take away my spiritual, mental, and emotional health. But how do I deal with them? Ah, here is the part that takes wisdom and discernment. Yes, these things need to go, but why are they there in the first place? This is important to know. For example, if I struggle with anger, it may not just be anger which needs to be put to death. What is the source of my anger? Perhaps it is really fear. Oftentimes the issues we try to put to death are really issues that need to be healed. They will never die if we just bury them alive. They will just pop up in some other area of our lives. Don't ask me how I know.

Sometimes we Christians set out to kill all our "enemies" when some of what we view as an enemy is really our friend. Instead of being an enemy, my anger might in reality be my friend telling me that something is wrong in my heart, something deeper than my anger. Maybe there is a deep wound which needs to be healed, or perhaps I have what we might call "root issues" or issues stemming from my family of origin. These issues color all our perceptions and relationships.

As I look back at the things which have been giants throughout my life, I remember one of the moments when I looked into the eyes of the giant called the fear of abandonment. I was looking back over my life story with my counselor. And for me, it was a moment of acknowledging the plans of the enemy which had been tailored against me specifically. Having been adopted at birth, I had this deep sense of having been abandoned. The story had been played out over and over again in my life. And the details really don't matter, what matters is that I faced it and continue to face it at times. That fear hindered my relationship with God and others. It led me to build walls around my heart, keeping others out so they could never get close enough to hurt me by abandoning me. Acknowledging this fear made me feel vulnerable but I sensed the challenge of the Holy Spirit. Would I risk unveiling this deep place within my heart or would I resist the work of God's Spirit who was leading me to healing waters? Would I take down the walls I had unknowingly built around my heart now that I could see them? Would I make myself vulnerable at this moment while my husband and counselor watched? And if I risked taking down those walls, did I have the promise of never being abandoned again? This is an issue I have with God. He promises good for our hearts, but He doesn't guarantee a bump-free flight in getting to the land of good. In Psalm 42, the Psalmist paints the picture of a deer panting for living water. It is really a picture of vulnerability. The words used indicate that this was a mature deer, educated by the experiences of his life. He took a risk by openly drinking from this stream, yet his thirst drove him. I felt like that deer during that moment. Would my thirst for healing and freedom be enough to drive me out into the openness? I stepped into the open. I wish I could say that I have always stayed there ever since that moment. I haven't, but I have learned to increasingly live in that place.

Like taking down the walls around a city, walls that were built to keep enemies out, makes that city visible and accessible to friends and enemies alike, taking down the walls around my heart has allowed others into my life in ways that make me more vulnerable and at the same time, allowed me to be more deeply intimate with my family, friends, and church. It has allowed me to drink deeply of living waters. As I have written before, it is the *both/and* principle of God. I have become more vulnerable AND stronger at the same time. Not one or the other, but *both/and*. God's ways are so mysterious, aren't they?

One of the benefits/risks (*both/and*) of being vulnerable is that I have gained some friends who hold my feet to the fire, so to speak, refusing to let me run away when the temperature gets hot. They hold my feet to the fire if I drift away from what my heart knows is true. Recently a friend asked me, "Why is it so difficult for you to write your thoughts in greeting cards when you can write your feelings for the world to read?" Ouch, I was nailed. I looked right at her and said, "Because it is more intimate writing to someone I am deeply in relationship with; it is more risky; you might reject me. The world wide web is not nearly so personal." Her eyes said she got it, but she won't let me by with it anymore. She and other dear ones keep watch over my soul to help me identify when the "enemies" are in close proximity.

Then a spiritual brother of mine shared with me how he had difficulty writing to those close to him and he wondered why. When I shared my journey, he shook his head and acknowledged the "ouch" of the truth's pain. He shared that he had been working through that, particularly with his daughter, but now gained insight from my story.

So back to my original point. There is a time to kill. A time to kill the enemies of our soul but first we must discern what the enemy looks like. Perhaps a short list would include the opposites of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). We need to put to death what Paul calls selfish ambition, envy and strife. We need to smite these things with deadly intent because they are serious enemies.

In the Old Testament days, God sometimes had his people go in and kill all the enemy. In my humanness, I probably can't explain that, but one thing I do know is that God's message was that the enemy would continue to perpetuate the things that would destroy God's children as long as they were allowed to exist in any shape, form, or fashion.

Thank God for the New Testament! But the principle is still applicable. In the New Testament, we are shown that the land we need to conquer is our internal land. The enemies of our spiritual life need to be dealt with. Seriously. We can do that by bringing those enemies into the light and allowing the work of the cross to put them to death.

And as we deal with other people, we need great wisdom. Let us not be too quick to tell others how to deal with certain issues until we know God's heart on the matter. Let's make sure we identify the enemy for when we deal with the hearts and souls of humanity, we have an awesome responsibility and an amazing privilege. It seems to me that the more time we spend pursuing our own enemies, the more easily we can recognize the true enemies in others and they are not always what we would assume they are. Sometimes, the enemy is camouflaged. My husband and sons are avid sportsmen, therefore I know a lot about camouflage. Camouflage needs to be adapted for different terrains and it must be changed according to the season. Satan camouflages in the same way. He disguises himself and his plans in order to disappear into the terrain on which we are living so that he is not obvious unless we slow down and take a good look. His disguises change with the seasons but that shouldn't discourage us because with each passing season, we have the potential to gain wisdom for the next one and we have the potential of growing in relationships with others who can help us identify our enemies.

So whether it is a time to kill or a time to heal or both, there is always grace for the season we find ourselves in. Journey on, my friend.

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