

Foreword

The “Autumn of Christian Life” takes the student on an exciting journey of faith – a journey that will stretch individuals and groups to look seriously at the changes and challenges in their daily lives. It is a journey on which each of us has already embarked ... the strength of this resource is that these pages give us a road map to follow and discuss as we deal with the “Autumn of Christian life”.

And just as the autumn of the year is not only for those who have reached a specific chronological age, the journey through daily life in these pages is not only for those of us who have “matured” in age but rather it is for all of God’s people who continue to journey together. As a matter of fact, you will find that our journey through life is always enhanced by having travelers of every age along with us, to inspire, question, affirm, and care for us, as we care for them.

Another powerful part of this discussion resource is that it helps each participant to look seriously at the changes, the losses, the sufferings that we all endure, but it does so by first looking through the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ Jesus! This is a book about hope and joy, and God’s grace through each of our days continues to seep out from every page. Yes, even in the midst of our sorrows and pain, we can celebrate life, in Christ Jesus. As we face the “Good Fridays” in our own lives, God’s Spirit allows us to focus on the power and promise of the Easter Resurrection! After every “Good Friday” in our lives, there’s always an Easter!

One great gift that people bring to their “autumns” of life is the gift of “Easterizing”. We celebrate life and share our lives with others, because we know how it all turns out: Jesus Christ wins over death and continues to bring us back to life! We celebrate life, not because things are going so well, but because we know that the Lord of Life continues to love and forgive and empower us to live life to the full. John 10:10 says it so well: “I (Jesus) have come to give you life ... and give it to you abundantly”. It is the abundant life in Christ that this book is all about! Enjoy celebrating your life in Christ as you talk and tell your faith stories to each other!

The reader will find much Joy for the Journey in these pages. This will happen because the pages are filled with helpful quotes, stories, questions, scriptures, prayers, and insights that will nudge people to look seriously at the changes and struggles in their lives.....and know that the Lord is there to uplift, guide, and woo us back to Him. As the title implies, we find meaning in life amid change, loss, and suffering by God’s grace through His death and Resurrection ... for us! (By the way, the “Travel Guides” included in each of the six sessions, are worth “the price” alone! Check out those resources! They themselves will keep you moving down your highways of life!)

If you are like I am, I often sense that words like “change, loss, and suffering” only have a negative connotation for many. Check out the familiar hymn, “Abide With Me”, where we sing, “...Change and decay in all around I see...” I remember, in the “spring” of my life (many years ago!), singing this and not feeling too good about myself or life...or anything! “Everything is going to pot”, as my Mom would sometimes remind us! And this was easy to agree with, since, for one thing, I was growing up in Chicago and was a die-hard Chicago Cubs fan! No one had to tell us that things were bad ... and probably going to get worse!

The “autumn” of our lives is meant to celebrate life in the midst of change, loss, and suffering because we live on “this side” of the Resurrection! “Change and decay” may surround us but God’s love and grace in Christ Jesus surrounds us even more! We are called, not to avoid or deny change and loss in our lives, but to celebrate life as a gift, in spite of the pain and problems. We see life as a Gift from God, and we are simply asked to live out this life, celebrating and serving others as we go on our daily “Journeys of Joy!”

“The Autumn of Christian Life” helps us to take Psalm 126:3 very seriously: “The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy!” That says it all! He HAS done it. It IS finished! The victory IS ours! Hooray for the Lord! Hooray for Life! HOORAY for the autumn of our lives! This resource helps small groups and individuals challenge each other to examine their lives – the past and the present; to help each other make life-changing choices and decisions; and to encourage each other to reach out with peace, love, and justice for all of God’s people. An unwritten theme throughout these pages is “Every Day is a Day to give Away!”... to each other, to ourselves, and also to those who think God has forsaken them!

I encourage you to follow the “road map” faithfully ... it will get you to a God-pleasing destination! Not wanting to speak for all the males of the world, I do confess that I always do better looking at a road map before I leave on a trip rather than trying to unfold that silly, clumsy Road Atlas as I desperately shout to my spouse, “Okay, okay, but I thought you knew where we were going!” For each of these six sessions, the term “journey” is used to keep us on track and to prevent us from getting lost in the cul-de-sacs of life!

One more thought before we head out on our journey: The focus of studying the “Autumn” of our lives cannot come at a more appropriate time. For the first time in U.S. history and culture, we are faced with the challenge of “mass aging”. Never before have there been so many older adults in our society. The world population increases with a net addition of nearly 1 million people age 60 or

older every month! Two-thirds of all people in human history who have ever reached 65 or older as well as three-fourths of all people who have ever reached 75 or older are living today! By 2030, there will be more people over 65 than under 18 in the U.S. And of all those over 65, 35% will be over 85!

Problem? No way. A challenge? You bet! This is an Opportunity, a Promise, a Gift, a blessing from the Lord! And it is resources like this one that will enable, enforce, and enhance our ministries together as God's people, as we travel the Road of Life together, in faith and in joy!

The Lord continues to provide exciting opportunities for His Church to respond to the increasing number of older adults in our congregations and communities. And the way to respond is not to dissect and segregate age groups into their own little "peer" parties. Rather, the way to respond is to provide groups and resources such as this that will help people of all ages to deal with their own changes, losses, and sufferings in the context of a Lord who came to live, die, and be resurrected in order to bring all of us New Life in Him!

Hooray for Life in Christ! Hooray for people who care! Hooray for the Reunings! Hooray for the "Autumn of Christian Life" that joyfully and positively enables each of us to celebrate life through the detours and scenery of Autumn. Yes, the "Lord has done great things for us "... and I'm glad!

Have a pleasant journey ... in the name of the healing Christ!

Rich
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