

## Foreword

Seasons are important. For those of us who live in the vicinity of North America's Great Lakes, seasons strongly influence daily life, determining what we wear, what household chores we do, and how we get from one place to another. We like the changing seasons, we tell friends who live in milder climates.

Seasons shape our imaginations, too. When the new life of spring rushes rowdily across the landscape, who can help but think of youth? Seasons have long shaped the life and worship of the church as well. One of my favorite Easter hymns makes the connection this way: "Tis the spring of souls today!" As metaphors and meteorology, the four seasons caused by the tilt of the Northern hemisphere toward and away from the sun over the course of an astronomical year intertwine with other seasons: the seasons of the Christian year, which illuminate and are illuminated by the natural seasons, and the seasons of our lives, the periods of growth and stagnation, of frozenness and warmth, that come to each of us.

What then of summer? I suppose there are some summer hymns, but I find it far easier to think of hymns related to winter – "snow was falling, snow on snow" – or springtime, or the autumn harvest. For the church, summertime is "ordinary time," and most of the biblical texts customarily selected as Sunday readings are about ordinary things: work, meals, money, and service to those in need.

This book is about ordinary things like these. By gathering rich reflections and asking important questions, Dick and Judy Reuning prompt us to think deeply about the season of life that usually gets the least thought but that may be the most life-shaping of all. This is for most people, as it is for the Earth, their period of greatest fruitfulness. And yet in the midst of the many activities of this season of life, it is tempting to neglect questions of meaning and to give all our attention to things other than our relationship with God and our need, in faith, for one another. We get caught up in ways of living that draw us away from the true sources of abundant life. We made the big choices back in springtime, we may tell ourselves, and we will have time to reconfirm them and to find time for God, friends, and church when autumn comes.

It is never certain that the autumn of life will be ours, of course. More important, though, is the fact that *these* days of our lives matter now, to us, to God, and to others. God's mercy is new every morning – and we need God's mercy amid the busy fruitfulness of summer as much as in

every other season, if not more. Slowing down to read and discuss the topics in this book, taking time to talk and pray about them with others, may help readers perceive and accept God's everyday mercy and discern the difference it can make, for them and for others.

This volume from LifeCrossings is especially timely during this period of economic crisis and social change, when many expectations about what the various seasons of life will be like are being disrupted. Many who had thought they were in the productive summertime of life now wonder if they will be able to save enough to enjoy retirement, and others have been forced out of jobs they once thought secure. These realities are reopening some of the questions explored in this book: questions about work and busyness, money and home. These are questions that arise amidst the real challenges of life. They are questions that Scripture and the wisdom of the Christian community over time can help us engage in faith and hope. They are questions we need to discuss with companions, drawing on the depth and breadth of faith. This book can support conversations like these.

Dorothy C. Bass, Ph.D.  
Valparaiso University