

A Clean Slate by Lou Ann Mokwa

Living in the world of God's creation, he gave us defined stages. With his Omniscient hand, he perfectly timed these periods for us with the rising and setting of the sun and changes in the seasons.

"And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years.'" (Gen 1:14)

He set the course of human development with a perfectly defined lifespan: conception, birth, infancy, toddler/childhood, adolescence, adulthood and even death.

"...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139:16)

As our modern culture has developed there are times when we experience a beginning and an end to chapters in our lives. One of these phases is the ending of summer as fall ushers in. For many, this initiates a new school year and provides a clean slate to launch a rebirth. In some places, the air becomes crisp, the vegetation changes notably and the days become shorter.

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." (Ecc 3:1)

This year, consider changing course a bit by embracing a clean slate. Like me, you might be way beyond having children who are entering school or you may no longer be gainfully employed. Prayerfully consider how God might change the look of your calendar this year. Obviously, there are lifestyle choices or traditions that reappear on the slate, but fall can be the perfect time to focus on renewing our minds.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Ro 12:2)

What did Paul mean by the phrase "renewing of your mind?"

For starters, *"To be made new in the attitude of your minds."* (Eph 4:23)

This renewal not a single event; it is a transformation that occurs through a process of spiritual growth. In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer was addressing Jewish Christians who had not progressed in their faith to maturity. In our day, some might refer to them as "carnal Christians." However, to avoid judgement or labels, this letter applies to all Christians, as none of us have achieved perfection on this earth. Only Jesus did. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."* (Heb 4:15)

The writer brings to light for these Hebrew Christians the stagnation in their spiritual lives.

*“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by **constant use** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Heb 5:12-14)*

This passage clearly indicates going back to the elementary teachings of Christ. He goes on to explain in chapter 6 what these are: repentance, faith in God, baptisms (i.e. doctrinal teaching), laying on of hands (i.e. ordaining of ministers), resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement. These are the A, B, Cs of Christianity and founded upon God’s Word. During worship, in unity we confess these fundamentals when we recite the creeds.

You might be asking; how can we gain hold of these principles AND flourish to maturity in Christ?

Continually seek God’s word for guidance. Consider these ideas or something else you have never done:

- teach Sunday school, or be an aide for someone who teaches Sunday school
- join or consider participating in a new Bible study
- take sermon notes and reread them during the week
- start a journal, focusing on your daily devotions or thoughts related to the scripture you are studying
- begin a “read the Bible in a year” challenge, keep notes while you read.
- Chose a section of scripture to memorize
- research ancient Biblical character (Moses, David, Daniel, Esther, Paul) or a more modern pillar of faith (Martin Luther, C.S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie Ten Boom, Elisabeth Elliot). Read their biographies or books they have written, listen to a podcast, take an on-line class, or watch a movie about them. Immerse yourself in the principles of their life, focusing on their unique journey with Jesus and how the Word impacted their lives.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list, nor should it be a list to tackle all at once. Pray for God to open a door to nudge you on your journey. Do not be discouraged if your slate looks the same, year after year. We are human by nature and old habits have a way of taking hold. But be sure to celebrate and praise God for the renewal, spiritual growth and fruit it bears for the Kingdom.

Back to Roman 12, Paul tells us:

“so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12: 5-8)

Whatever you do, remember:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” (1 Cor 12: 4)