

The Ag Progress - May 2020 Dispatch

A Time to Plant...and a Time to Mourn

This issue of the *Dispatch* focuses on the themes of normalcy and disruption. What has not been fully appreciated by commentators in this difficult season of our national life is that both of these are true for us, and true at the same time. Lance reflects on the normal patterns of agricultural life that have continued, while Davon brings us into the sadness felt by many because plans have been disrupted and long-expected celebrations have been cancelled. Bill puts all of this in the rich biblical context of Ecclesiastes 3, the reflection on the different seasons of life. We hope you enjoy this month's Dispatch. Let us know your reactions!

Life Changes; Life Continues

Lance Woodbury

There is no season such delight can bring,
As summer, autumn, winter, and the spring.

---William Browne (1590 - 1645)

Most readers of the *Dispatch* know that farmers and ranchers were good at “social distancing” before the practice took center stage in our lives. Agriculturalists often spend much of their day on their own, running equipment, tending to crops or livestock, working in and with nature and away from the crowds.

The slowdown of our cities and rise in unemployment began just as our hectic calving and planting seasons required intense work. While many in urban areas saw a major reduction in activity, most rural businesses continued with busy schedules, full staffing, regular feeding, and managing crop and animal inputs while operating at full capacity.

The complex nature of the agriculture supply chain might impact the products sold to the consumer, such as meat in restaurants or milk in schools or ethanol in gasoline, but those growing and raising our nation's food, fiber and fuel supply haven't had much of a chance to slow down.

The cycles of nature continue. The growing season is renewed. The sun sets and rises. Animals and crops need fed and nurtured; to do otherwise goes against the deeply held calling of a farmer or rancher – even when prices are falling.

Our world will operate differently in the future. And we'll adjust. Robert Frost, at his eightieth birthday celebration, offered the following wisdom with poetic brevity. **“In three words, I can sum up everything I've learned about life. It goes on.”**



A Time for Mourning, a Time for Longing

By Davon Cook

If you have school aged kids or grandkids, May is the season for rites of passage: elementary field day, prom, graduation at all stages. This year is quite different. Among my social set, there is much sadness for the seniors who won't see a ceremony or a prom. There is concern for the high school and college graduates launching their professional lives in a very difficult job market. In my own household, there is a college student's frustration at the change to a prized internship and a high schooler's disappointment at qualifying for state FFA speaking and not going.

Of course, those denials pale in comparison to the myriad of much graver issues. Death. Job loss. Generation-altering economic impact. Some days, it feels like a time of mourning on so many literal and figurative fronts.

What do we do with that? In my family, it's a balancing act of recognizing our need to 'mourn' what we miss, but also keep it in perspective of how very blessed we are. It's recognizing the difference in *mourning* over losing a loved one or being unable to provide for a family, versus *longing* for the previously routine aspects of our life.

Perhaps that *longing* can evolve to a lasting appreciation for normal things when they do return. I think back to my grandmother's bountiful flower garden. Having lived through very hard times in the Depression (and no, I am not comparing our current discomfort to that!), she treasured the seed and soil that created flowers every spring to brighten her home—the home she didn't take for granted. Two or three years from now, will we treasure the things we currently long for and miss? Will I happily sit through outdoor graduation either frying in the sun or getting rained on? I hope so!

Faith and Family Business

Dr. Bill Long

A Time to Plant. . .and A Time to Mourn (Ecclesiastes 3:2, 4)

Ever since the Byrds released their iconic song "Turn, Turn, Turn" late in 1965, their ruminative re-creation of the words of Ecclesiastes 3 has occupied, and sometimes haunted, our collective psyche. Ecclesiastes 3 is a great reflection on the process or, in the words of the Byrds, the "turnings" of life. Life is broad enough to give us time for birth and death, for embracing and refraining from embracing, for planting and reaping. The orderly course of nature gives us an opportunity to develop judgment and wisdom, since we realize that all things have their "times" or "seasons," and we do best to recognize and try to tell those times as they happen.

Yet, the interesting thing in Ecclesiastes 3 is that these processes are supposed to be consecutive. Mourning and dancing don't happen at the same time; birth and death don't occur together. There is a time for each, and each has its claim on our lives, but they are distinct experiences in time.

One of the great, sad and powerful ironies of our time today, in late May 2020, is that the opposite categories of Ecclesiastes 3 are happening *at the same time*. Planting has just taken place. Planting corresponds to the movements in Ecclesiastes 3 of giving birth; of dancing, of embracing, of building up. It is a hopeful and joyful time. But the terrible irony of our time is that mourning is happening right in the season of planting; death right in the season of birth; refraining from embracing when one should be embracing. Planting happens, but the joy of graduation together, with family and friends, does not. We rejoice, and we weep--at the same time.

