

## A Sermon for DaySpring

By Eric Howell

*Thresholds of Change*

Colossians 3.1

August 3, 2026

Good morning and welcome to August. August is a month whose name originates from Augustus, the Roman emperor. I read that the etymology of that name means venerable, majestic, and worthy of honor. But I think that has to be totally wrong. I think somewhere deep in Latin, *August* means *oppressive heat*. “It’s so August today” they said, fanning themselves. A secondary meaning of August, deeper in the dictionary I’m certain-- must be something like “everything’s changing or about to change, are you ready for it?” Of all the months, August is when things change.

In August of this year, we’re going through change, even at the church. Shovels are going in the ground, programs and schedules and locations will be different. Church change can be unsettling especially if we’re dealing with changes in every other aspect of life, but sometimes there’s change in church life, too. At Passport camp last week, the campers who went with us will remember the leaders put on a fun skit with 2 characters named Ebb and Flow. They’d go up on stage to their own walk-up music—sometimes you have to ebb, sometimes you have to flow. There’s always in church life and its liturgies an ebb and flow between what was and what will be, between the traditions and the fresh movement of the spirit. It’s right there in the architecture of stone and windows.

In our reading this morning, the author of Ecclesiastes, called The Teacher, ponders the August of his life—how everything is going to change--and what it all means. Throughout the book he offers reflections that are kind of grim, if you’re not ready for them: “Vanity, vanity,” he says, “Everything is vanity.” It’s the word most repeated in the book. *Hebel* is the word. It means woodsmoke. Everything is like smoke—it isn’t permanent, it’s not going to last, you can’t take it with you.

Ecclesiastes is ancient wisdom for a very modern realization: life isn’t permanent; you can’t take it with you, everything changes. I’ve always thought of The Teacher of Ecclesiastes like an old man, on his front porch, smoking his pipe, looking over his fields, sighing that nothing is as at was. He’s nostalgic for people he’s lost along the way, and a little despondent that things he spent his whole life working for he’s going to lose when he dies anyway. I thought of it as a book from and for elders.

Recently though, I learned that Ecclesiastes is the favorite book of some teenagers, too. It makes sense: the angsty-ness and super-indulgent self-reflection, and questions about, and perhaps some despair about, the meaning of life. It turns out, are just as heavy on the very young as the very old. Vanity, vanity, everything is vanity. What’s the point anyway? All the things they told me were important turn out to be not all that important after all.

It's grim wisdom, unless you receive it as I think it's supposed to be offered—as freedom from the illusion. Once you have eyes to see life in seasons and all existence in flow, you're beginning to be set free to seek what's most important. To say “Everything is worthless like woodsmoke,” is more than a bit of hyperbole. But to say “everything changes like woodsmoke rising into the air,”—now that's just true.

Everything changes, and a whole lot of life is how we deal with and respond to that which is changing--in seasons, in our bodies, in relationships.

At DaySpring, experiencing all of that, we learned early on to hold it all lightly-- so that we could stay bound to that which is most important. If we squeeze the church, we choke the life out of the thing we love; we learn to hold it, with strong arms, with gentle hands, and with openness to one another and to the Spirit. Tonight we're breaking ground on construction in the children's building areas, which is very exciting to finally be ready to go after years of preparation. But whew, it's been a lot of change. In the last few weeks, especially last Saturday, we cleared out over half of the meeting space that we have in the church. Offices, storage areas, classrooms. Staff had to relocate. Our main office is now a rolling desk parked in the kitchen. All the staff had to relocate, except for me. I have the office's mini-fridge and microwave in the corner of my office now. (You know, not all change is bad!) Soon dirt is going to be moved, walls are coming down. Then new walls will start to rise. Not all change is bad, even if it comes with a cost.

The physical changes we've already begun to see compel other changes in the rhythms of church's life in our programs and plans for this coming year. We hold them lightly, too, as we hold them up to God at every turn.

Sunday school, for example, is the biggest single part of our rhythms to hold lightly--since most of our meeting spaces won't be available to us. We realized as we were planning for this, that we simply had to adapt to the reality. So, instead of meeting in rooms at 9:45 on Sundays, instead we'll go to one another's homes and be in groups that can be the seeds of sweet friendships. This is change. Not having Sunday School the way it's been done means we'll lose something this year—all those wonderful classes for all ages on Sunday mornings and the relationships between the teachers and students.

We gain something, too. We gain a season of relationships and hospitality given and received, and the possibility of new friendships—friendship is a precious gift; as beloved as this church and campus is, the life of DaySpring was never to be about the programs and buildings. It's about the life that happens here in friendship with one another and with God. This happens in the programs and buildings, and trees and open spaces, and songs and silence, and trust that in the changes that come, God is transforming us. We hold it lightly. But God holds us tightly.

It means that this August for us is a moment to pause and consider how we deal with changes. From Ecclesiastes and from living very long, we learn change is always

happening in us and around us, and there's little we can do to create an existence that doesn't change. How you feel about that says something about your personality. Some people have a personality that embraces and is enticed by crossing thresholds that begin new chapters in life--they love it. For other people they want things to stay as they are, even if things aren't so great, it's better than changing anything. Change can be exciting. Change can also be hard. For most people it can be both at the same time. Every increment of change holds something—some promise for the future, but it also—every increment of change is a little death. For there to be change, something that was before is no longer. Something good may take its place, but there's also the loss of what was.

As The Teacher and life experience make clear, change is a fundamental essence of existence. All creation is moving, flowing. Everything that is moves toward life and death and then to life again. Life flows through entities one to another like water in a river, like carbon in the soil, like air, and relationships, and bodies. Creation names an existence that is always in motion.

It's one thing to have a thermodynamic theology of a creation in motion. It's another thing to face changes happening in your own life that aren't just flowing like a gentle breeze through the leaves of a cottonwood but rattle you like an earthquake. Some changes are bigger than others and many of them much bigger than how classes and groups at church operate for a while.

Everyone you meet is either moving away from a major change in their life or moving toward a major change in their lives or in the middle of one right now.

A little grace for one another is helpful, in these days. It seems like a lot, a lot is unstable in the world today. It's hard to keep up and to keep up and keep your sanity, not to mention your peace. And also, besides all that, it's August.

The month of August is The Month of Change. August is the month of oppressive, relentless, heat. But it is also the month, of any time on the calendar, when there is change. Some of them are big ones.

Mommies and daddies are soon going to fit an oversized backpack onto the thin shoulders of a little bit and watch him skip into his first preschool class or shyly shuffle into there. And as he does on day one, it is the end of a season of life and beginning of another for the mommies and daddies and the little one. Change is exciting and tender.

Across the nation and across town, moms and dads are going to help load overstuffed cars with lamps and bedspreads and watch that little dude, now grown up--drive away from home to live in her first dorm room. That's a big change, too, the end of a season of life and beginning of another for the moms and dads and the big kids. Change is exciting and kind of sad. Either way, it's coming.

As we go through life, we see change is inescapable, even when we're not the one changing. Sometimes it's sad. Every change is a little death.

A trusted colleague has left for another company. Now the office seems a little less interesting, the work a little less inspiring than it did before. With a sigh on a Monday morning, there's change and a little death.

Go to a church long enough and some friends won't be there anymore at the end of a summer, semester, or a lifetime. It can take a little of the wind out of the sails. Go to a church long enough, and you'll look around a full room and still wonder where did everyone I know go? That's the price of friendship. On a Sunday, there's change and a little death.

Your body slows and another new pain flares up, and the doc says you have to go on a daily med. And you know this is just the beginning. It can be discouraging; each change a little death. At every turn, we need one another on this pilgrimage of life as we seek to stand and find our footing on the solid rock of Christ.

It's not all bad of course. Let's not be too grim, please. We need one another in the joys, too. Move to a new city to begin a new job. Or walk down the aisle but walk back down the same aisle with your new spouse. You leave something behind; but you look ahead and see the potential for new friends, and new opportunities and experiences. It's often in the heat of August that there are goodbyes and hellos and a prayer that God knows divine plans for us and those plans are for the good.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes, which we might find a little grim, is answered by the spirituality of Colossians for a time of change. When we face change; when we deal with uncertainty. When we seek the meaning of life, in all things: We, who have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We set our minds on the things above. Just as woodsmoke rises, so do our eyes; so do our hearts to God.

To be raised with Christ is a baptism and resurrection image, a strong and sure reminder that after death there comes new life in Christ. Through the little deaths we experience through each change that comes in life, and the final change as this life comes to an end, in Christ, our hope is life from death. You are the living embodiment of this for all the world. You who are raised with Christ. You who are raised with Christ are seekers for Christ in all things: in the vanities and despairs, in the changes and uncertainties. We hold one another; we hold what is precious; we cling to Christ; we share our hope with the world.

What this means is that our fullness of life is found in Christ who is all in all no matter what changes. In him, all things hold together, even when it seems everything is being blown, whether by accident or circumstances of life, or by powers and principalities, or by choices for change that we accept and adopt. We do not just endure; we do not just persevere. We seek Christ in all things, so we ask with open hands a prayer.

A prayer like this:

O God of August,  
what do you desire to be made new in me through this change?  
I turn eyes upward and my heart to you;  
Set my feet on the solid rock;  
Open my hands to all I must hold lightly  
that my hands, and arms, and heart and spirit  
may be fully open to your grace and your people, whom you love  
This is our prayer.  
Our prayer for August, our prayer for all days, even this day.  
Amen.

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