Spiritual Rhythm

Title: *Spiritual Rhythm: Being With Jesus Every Season of Your Soul*

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Book Description:

'Abide in me,' Jesus tells us, 'and you will bear much fruit.' Yet too often we forget that fruit needs different seasons in order to grow. We measure our spiritual maturity by how much we do rather than how we are responding to our current spiritual season. In Spiritual Rhythm, Mark Buchanan replaces our spirituality of busyness with a spirituality of abiding. Sometimes we are busy, sometimes still, sometimes pushing with all we've got, sometimes waiting. This model of the spiritual life measures and produces growth by asking: Are we living in rhythm with the season we are in? With the lyrical writing for which he is known, Mark invites us to respond to every season of the heart, whether we are flourishing and fruitful, stark and dismal, or cool and windy. In comparing spiritual rhythms to the seasons of the year, he shows us what to expect from each season and how embracing the seasons causes our spiritual lives to prosper. As he draws on the powerful words of Scripture, Mark explores what activities are suitable or necessary in each season—and what activities are useless or even harmful in that season. Throughout the book, Mark weaves together stories of young and old, men and women, families, couples, and individuals who are in or have been through a particular season of the heart. As Mark writes, 'I pray that this book meets you in whatever season you're in, and prepares you for whatever seasons await. I pray that it helps you find your voice, your stride, your rhythm, in season or out. Mostly, I pray that you, with or without my help, find Christ wherever you are. And that, even more, you discover that wherever you are, he's found you.'

Book Quotes:

And then God gave me insight: this was winter. It would end, in time, but not by my own doing. My responsibility was simply to know the season, and match my actions and inactions to it. It was to learn the slow hard discipline of waiting. It was my season to believe in spite of—to believe in the absence of evidence or emotion, when there's nothing, no bud, no color, no light, no birdsong, to validate belief. It was my time to walk without sight. Location 137

And then I saw it, hidden in plain sight: if we are to bear much fruit—if that's the goal of the Christian life—then the best model for spiritual maturity is seasons. Fruit grows in seasons, and all seasons are necessary for growing it. And seasons are as much about what is not happening as what is. It has as much to do with inactivity as with activity, waiting as with working, barrenness as with abundance, dormancy as with vitality. Location 162

For though we want the burden lifted and the beauty prolonged, God has an infinitely better idea: that the Man

for All Seasons would walk with us in season and out, and then, when all is done, take us home. Location 180

Winter shames those in it. It feels like personal failure, something we've caused, or missed, or faltered in. We chide ourselves for being there. We're sure it's our fault. We wonder if we're crazy, lazy, stupid. Location 279

What I do believe, now, is that our hearts have seasons, and the longest of them, if not in duration then in intensity, is winter. There's no preventing it, though there are ways to steward it. Location 289

Both life's winter and the heart's winter have this in common: meaning is bankrupt. Things we once found captivating and stimulating—rich with meaning—we now find futile and bewildering. The trips we used to go on, the art we once pondered, the books we loved to read, the subjects we delighted to talk over—winter makes it all dreariness and drudgery. We go from the purpose-driven life to the purpose-starved life. Events and accomplishments are leached of significance. Ambition, accomplishment, aspiration, beauty, courage—none of it means anything in wintertime. Location 318

Scholar Walter Brueggemann calls this psalm "an embarrassment to conventional faith." He even asks, "What is a psalm like this doing in our Bible?" His answer in my words: Psalm 88 gives us language that transposes agony into prayer. Sorrow seeks to render us mute. Psalm 88 gives voice to what is most angry and grief-stricken and frightened inside us. It shapes brokenheartedness into sacrament. It allows us to break our silence even when God refuses to break his. Location 354

Winter is like that: it has power to eclipse all the good we've stored up, and to plunge us into a nighttime that seems all we've ever known and, worse, all we'll ever know. Winter seems all-consuming and never-ending. Location 381

Winter hides God. It has power to sever my knowledge about God from my experience of him, and to hold the two apart, so that my theology and my reality become irreconcilable. Location 384

Winter is friendless. In it, we experience a terrible, terrifying aloneness. Location 398

Abandonment. Rejection. Isolation. This is the shape of the soul in winter. It feels friendless. And it feels this way even, maybe most, in a crowd. At church. In Bible study. At weddings and reunions. Even when many surround us, the heart's winter makes us feel estranged. It makes us feel unloved and unlovable. Location 403

All is dead, or appears so. A tree is so stark and bony in winter, it's almost impossible to believe it will ever bear fruit or give shade again. Winter is when your heart is so closed up you can't imagine it ever opening again, your dreams so buried you can't conceive of them resurrecting. Location 421

I believe every heartache and hardship, and the profound loneliness such things bring, has a back door. They allow us entry into a communion with Christ we don't usually experience in our days of ease and song. Most of us have had our deepest encounters with Christ not on mountaintops but in valley floors. Location 478

Prayer is the ongoing work of winter. But this can go either way. Wintertime can poison the life of prayer as much as awaken it. It can deaden it, or revive it. Usually, it forces a fluctuation between the two. Location 547

That's where Psalm 88 helps. In this man's wintertime, he prays, too, though his capacity to believe is strained almost to extinction. He prays anyhow, and in this way: according to what he knows of God, not what he sees of God. Or put it this way: his praying is anchored in God's revelation of himself in Scripture, not in his firsthand experience of God in daily life. He doesn't pray because he can taste and see that the Lord is good. He prays in spite of that, contrary to the evidence at hand. What he tastes is bitterness; what he sees is darkness. Circumstances erode his faith rather than buttress it. Location 568

Winter grows pure faith. It grows almost nothing, but it grows biblical faith like no other season can. It combines the unique conditions that nurture the certainty of things hoped for and the assurance of things unseen. It is the season above all seasons when we walk by faith and not by sight. There is no better ground for growing an abiding faith that weathers the worst life can throw at you. Location 576

If you are in winter, there may be, hidden in its bleakness, a rare opportunity. You may be able to lose some weight: the weight of unneeded responsibility, the burden of useless activity. It may be the season to say an unapologetic no to the things to which, recently or long ago, you said a hardy or an unenthusiastic yes. I'm not advocating irresponsibility. But I am advocating simplicity. I'm saying that this may be the one shot you have at becoming less so that, in time, Christ's fruit in you might become greater. Location 651

Another good work of winter is waiting. Winter forces us to wait. And waiting forces faith to grow. Location 656

Maybe the greatest gift of winter, a gift that winter alone gives, is that it makes us heavenly minded. It breaks our addiction to this-worldliness and nurtures in us an anticipation of things unseen. Location 717

God's springtime begins with renewal within you. The renewal comes out of dryness and wilderness. Dryness. Wilderness. Hear those as bywords for crisis. Spring springs forth from death. It unaccountably, inexplicably, unexpectedly shows up in the least likely places and most unpromising circumstances. Location 1056

Jesus reserves his deepest intimacy for winter. But he displays his greatest handiwork in spring. He brings living water into thirsty lands, emotional strength to faltering hearts, physical wellness to the sick and the lame. Location 1155

Terrain that once was difficult, dangerous, and grueling to cross becomes smooth and straight and safe. Spring is when what has been tortuous, arduous, perilous becomes otherwise. The yoke seems easy, the burden light. Location 1249

Which in some ways is what summer is: a foretaste of heaven. It's a rehearsal of paradise, a preview of the promised land. Location 1601

Speech fulfills celebration. Admiration that goes unspoken, thanksgiving that remains mute, celebration that's hidden in the heart—the silence quenches the sentiment. Location 2619

Unspoken praise is no praise at all. It is praise stillborn. It is a Roman candle that fizzles in its canister. It is Lazarus raised from the dead but left in the tomb, swaddled in grave clothes. Location 2620

All the same, let's not miss the spiritual meaning here. What gets you through winter are fat reserves, to put it delicately. Girth on the bone. A certain pinkish roundness. I think, for many of us, our spiritual wintertimes are so long and hard and deep and grim because our spiritual autumns are so lean. We're anorexics just at the moment we ought to be gluttons. We don't feast when the season calls for it. Location 2633

Thankfulness can throw mountains into the sea. Thankfulness can overcome evil with good. Thankfulness can turn adversity into advantage. Thankfulness is more than an act. It's an orientation. It's a reframing of reality—not in some whistling-in-the-dark way but in a fixing-our-eyes-on-what-is-unseen way. Radical thankfulness makes sense only if behind our touch-and-see reality another reality is hard at work. Which is exactly the case. If there's one thing the Bible makes clear, cover to cover, it's that what we see ain't all there is. It's not even half of all there is. It's at best shadow and echo and rumor of what's really going on. Location 2673

Take a situation you'd rather not be in. Spend time giving thanks in it. Thank God in spite of it. Thank God for

all the good that still abounds regardless of it. Now, take a further step: thank God for it. Do this not as an act of masochism but as an act of faith. Of course you're not thankful for the specific grief, tragedy, mess, loss. But one day you'll see that even the worst things in your life God used as raw material for some of the best things in your life. Location 2681

The majority of people in our churches are not staking their future on the steadfast goodness of God, who promises never to leave or forsake us. They're hedging their bets. They're seeking more prudent ways to secure their future. They're practicing not frugality (few North Americans could be accused of that) but plain old stinginess. And they're refusing to put God to the test in the single way the Bible tells us it's appropriate to do that—to entrust him with a full 10 percent of our income and watch him throw open the floodgates of heaven. Location 2785

Midian today is whatever it is in our lives that keeps us from bearing fruit. Might be a habit, an attitude, an addiction, a refusal, a demand. But Midian's power derives from a compact we make with Baal, and here's who I think Baal is today: whatever it is in our lives which we believe holds ultimate power over our future, and so which keeps us from trusting God. Baal is that which we believe secures our future. A job, a position, a relationship, a pension plan. It's not that these things, in their proper places, are not good. Most things that aspire to godhood—eros, mammon, and the like—make excellent house pets and gracious servants. Kept in a subservient role, they're great to have around. But when they rule us, and dictate to us what we can and cannot do, and lure us away from radical trust in God and obedience to him, they grow ugly and surly and brutish. A Baal indulged gives free rein to Midian, and the result is we thresh our wheat in winepresses. Location 2805

We should be suspicious of anything that rivals our devotion to God, anything that distracts us from our pursuit of his kingdom. Anything. And we should subject all our evasions and rationalizations to the most thoroughgoing scrutiny. Location 2860

I often hear from people with various besetting sins—pornography, waywardness, alcoholism, destructive gossip, violent temper—that they are merely repeating their mother's or father's behavior, as if that absolves them of any responsibility. Gideon's story instructs us otherwise. It says deal with it. Deal with it for your own sake. And deal with it for your father's sake, or your mother's: they might just be the first people freed by your freedom. The whole creation, Paul says, waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. Others await our taking hold of liberty. Your own forebears might be waiting in such eager expectation, without even knowing it until they see it, but when you live out your glorious freedom under the fatherhood of God, walk in the authority and inheritance of your true adoption as sons and daughters, it will beckon them to freedom, too. I have seen this a hundred times: men and women come to faith in Christ, break their bondage to decay, throw off the idols of their childhood, and soon after their parents do the same. Location 2884

James tells us to resist the devil and he will flee. That's impressive, because Peter says the devil's like a lion, seeking someone to devour. Our impulse with lions is to flee them, useless as that may be. It seems harebrained, and futile, to resist a lion, defy a lion, put a lion to the chase. But it's what James says. Neither the devil nor Baal is as powerful as they make themselves out to be. They're more shadow than substance, more growl and scowl than tooth and claw. Both Baal and the devil are easier to rout than they'd have you think, just as their minions—the Midianites, the townsfolk, the hosts of hell, whoever—are not half as menacing as they look. Location 2906

This book is, first, a modest attempt to help you walk in grace in every season. But it also contains a modest proposal: that we rethink some basic premises about spiritual formation. We tend to measure spiritual maturity by the duration and strength of our attachments and commitments. In short, by how much we do. This yardstick has been serviceable up to a point. But it's seriously flawed. It's simply not biblical. The biblical

measure of spiritual maturity is fruit. My modest proposal: seasons are a better way to understand our spiritual lives. And each season has its own rhythm. Location 2952

Everyone seeks balance. Everyone longs for that magical combining of rest and play and work that, once found, will make life simple, elegant, easy: balanced. Where is the perfect middle, they ask, the right proportion of duty and freedom, church and job, neighbors and family, time for others and time for me? There is none. It is no more to be found than unicorns or perfect churches. There are only seasons, seasons for everything, and seasons are inherently unbalanced. The watchword for seasons isn't balance. It's rhythm. And rhythm requires a different approach. I seek balance when I stand up in a kayak. Staying in the boat depends on it. But I seek rhythm when I paddle the kayak. Getting anywhere depends on it. There's balance needed, too, but a balance that flows out of the rhythm, and often enough the rhythm forces me to extremes, a steep leaning one way or the other, so as to keep balance. We crave balance but need rhythm. Location 2966

Often our pursuits are trivial. They might masquerade as great dreams, but it's by their fruit that you know them. We gain things that perish only to lose things meant to endure, things we were to guard with all our hearts: we get a big house, but estranged children; we win the applause of strangers, and lose our friends; we acquire wealth and status, but grow cold toward God; we acquire much and spend much, but give little and—really—get little. The Bible tells us to seek the Lord. It tells us to seek peace and pursue it. It tells us to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We can know all this, and even do it, but lose our way along the way and end up chasing things we'll never catch or, if we do, wish we hadn't. Location 3096

But here's what I keep trying to say: it's impossible to pursue anything without forsaking other things. It's impossible to live in the grip of a pursuit and manage it in some balanced way. By their very nature, grand pursuits demand sacrifice. They require that we live gloriously lopsided. Magnificently obsessed. Location 3101

The only fruit that glorifies God stems from abiding in Christ, and he in us. It's a life of faith and faithfulness. It's a life of utter dependency and yet, strangely, daring initiative. Put another way, much and yet nothing depends on me. What depends on me is my tenacious dependence on Christ. I must do that thing which exposes the utmost bankruptcy of all my doings. Location 3170

The name of Jesus is his nature. It is his essence. It is his inmost self. When I speak or act in his name, I speak in his stead. If I'm to do that with integrity, not duplicity, then I must take pains to make sure my actions and words align with his actions and words, that there's a clear, unambiguous correspondence between the two. Otherwise, I usurp his authority. I use his name in vain. Otherwise, my body language gainsays my words, my tone betrays me. To be in Jesus is to act and speak in his name, which means it is to align my acting and speaking with who he is. It is to conform my life to his life. Location 3182

James captures the subtle but huge difference between hearing God's Word under an "I should" clause and hearing it under an "I will" clause. Our churches throng with the former, are sparse with the latter. The former hear the Word of God and say, "I should." I should tithe. I should stop looking at porn. I should spend more time at home. I should care for the oppressed. I should give to the poor. I should make God first. And so on. I should is the watchword of the damned. Only, with the damned, there's a single verb added to the clause: I should have. I will is the salute of the redeemed. God's Word compels them. For them, the distance between hearing the Word and heeding it is a single step. The time delay between the audio and the audition, the hearing and the doing, is no more than the time lapse between pulling a trigger and firing a bullet, turning a tap and drawing water, flicking a switch and the light coming on. The hearing causes the heeding. Location 4665

So here's what I suggest. Do not go one inch deeper in knowing the Word of God until you've taken one step farther in obeying the Word of God. Location 4673

“Always learning,” Paul says, “and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Sometimes gaining knowledge is merely a strategy of evading truth. Location 4678

I am starting to understand what Cheryl has always known: prayer, even the sweaty bone-breaking kind known as intercession, is not an act of exertion but a source of replenishment. It is not fuel burned but fuel tapped. It is not the duty of the disciple but the privilege. It’s a perk of friendship, like having the key to someone’s boat or car and the freedom to use it whenever you like. Location 4702

Hebrews tells us that we can come to the throne of grace whenever we want. This is astonishing. In the Old Testament, no one ventured near to God without due preparation. You had to be invited, chastened, chosen, cleansed. Even then, your chances of surviving the encounter were slim. People who were ambushed by God—Jacob at the river Jabbok especially comes to mind—walked away amazed by one thing: they saw God and didn’t die. Location 4707

“Do you know the difference between a conviction and a crusade?” “I don’t know what you mean.” “Well, okay. A conviction is a belief inside you so large, so deep, so passionate, that it holds you more than you hold it. It defines you. It’s anchored in your soul. You can’t imagine yourself apart from that belief. It’s truth you’d take a bullet for. “A crusade, on the other hand, is an attempt to get those around you to agree with you, or else. It’s an attempt to conform the world to your ideas. “The problem is this: a crusade is usually an end-run around a conviction. A crusade is not an attempt to change the world on the basis of your deep convictions but to compensate for the lack of them. A crusade is trying to establish the kingdom out there before we’ve established it in here.” Location 4788

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.