

Introduction

Welcome

Each stage of life poses special challenges and offers special gifts. The differences between the various stages allow opportunities for learning, for preparing, and for humor. Life in an intergenerational Christian community provides numerous occasions for discussing these challenges and opportunities and for growing in Christian love and commitment. **While the conversation herein is often about one particular time of life, it is appropriate for all ages to adapt and prepare for the future assured of God's forgiveness, following Jesus' example, and with the Spirit's guidance.**

The purpose of ***The Autumn of Christian Life: Finding Meaning and Joy Amid Change and Loss*** is to **help Christians of all ages** (1) examine the unique characteristics of this later time of life, (2) plan for it and make good choices and decisions, and (3) struggle together to discover what it means to bring the kingdom of God of justice, hope and redemption to our world even while dealing with the special problems and challenges of life at this age.

The picture on the cover reminds us that, even amid change, loss and suffering, Jesus' incredible love will always be with us and that beauty is also possible in this season of life.

It is recommended that groups undertake ***From Here to Community: Enhancing Christian Community in Today's Society*** prior to embarking on this topic. Although not required, this provides a thorough understanding of today's Christian community and its possibilities, a terrific perspective from which to embark on other topics such as ***Autumn of Christian Life***.

The Seasons of Life

Our lives might be seen as having four seasons, each with its own possibilities and problems that come with the reality of change, gains and losses. There is no decreed age when one season ends and another begins such as the calendar saying that winter starts on December 21st. Like with the weather, there may be a sudden wintry blast in autumn announcing that a new season is on the way.

In the **Spring** of our lives, the seeds of our future are sown; the budding talents, values, and ideas are trained and carefully tended. During our **Summer**, growth must be shaped, directed, and monitored, and then, hopefully, fresh produce appears (children, possessions, helping others, job advancement).

Autumn is the time when some of the fruits of our labor can be harvested and enjoyed while others are put aside for the future. This is that phase of life when rearing children and building career are largely finished for most people who will now have more freedom to offer themselves to serve others, to explore new avenues of life, to make God's kingdom of love and peace a reality. For many people this coincides with retirement years in the 60's through the 80's, although for financial reasons other people must continue to work and some may be raising their grandchildren. Autumn may be short or non-existent if illness and death intervenes.

In **Winter** the storehouse must be tapped for the reserves there. It is that time prior to death when one's physical and/or mental abilities have declined to the point where independence is threatened and interaction with others is compromised.

Six Journeys

The *Autumn of Christian Life* suggests change and the passage of time. For each of the six sessions the metaphor of a journey will be used to remind us of the course of our life:

- **DESTINATION** – What we hope to see and understand on today's journey.
- **POSTCARD** – Sharing among the group the thoughts and actions triggered by the previous session.
- **FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY** – Scripture and prayer.
- **ENCOUNTERS ALONG THE WAY** – The heart of the session – a story or drama, readings from respected authors, and the central questions to be discussed.
- **NOTES FOR THE TRAVEL LOG** – Brief summary of the main points of the session.
- **RE-ENTRY** – Taking insights from this session into daily life. It includes personal reflection, a challenge for action, and additional reading under the heading
“Digging Deeper.”
- **TRAVEL GUIDES** – References used in each session.

Flexible Scheduling

LifeCrossings materials are timed to fill a 60 minute-session with thought-provoking and informed discussion for busy people and for Sunday morning church schedules with only one hour available for Adult Study. The Re-entry section is “homework.” An evening format of one and half hours provides more opportunity for personal sharing and more thorough coverage of the material including some from the Re-Entry section. For these reasons one of our field-testing sites chose to cover each session in one-hour time periods over two consecutive Sunday mornings.

Leader’s Guide

A comprehensive Leader’s Guide is available at www.lifecrossings.com or 614-451-0519. This provides extensive teaching tips, helpful visual aids, discussion hints and supplementary background material to make optimal use of valuable time both during the session and during the preparation.

Stories

All of the stories and dramas in *The Autumn of Christian Life: Finding Meaning and Joy Amid Change and Loss* are true stories whose places and characters have been disguised but not exaggerated. Many of the stories occur in a fictitious contemporary church called “Hope Church” where Rick and Pam are members.

Commitment

The sessions form a progression of thought and action that has the potential to change your life. You are encouraged to:

- Embark on the entire six sessions.
- Make this book yours – take notes, circle new ideas, read regularly.
- Be a good listener. Let others speak for themselves.
- Share your thoughts, experiences, and hopes.
- Honor one another’s privacy.
- Try to be open to the new ideas and actions that are suggested in each session.
- Do the Re-entry activities as much as possible.
- Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in your life.
- Don’t short-change yourself; take the time and effort to dig deeper into this topic.

You won’t be disappointed! God bless your learning and action!
Have a good harvest!