

# A time to plant, and a time to uproot.

For the last three years we have lived in a house just south of Hobart. It's a funny old place, a rental provided as part of my work for the church. It's modern but quirky, obviously designed by a non-kitchen-aware man. It's squishy for two adults and four large (and increasingly larger) children and frustrates our yearning for hospitality.

But it's been a home to us over these last three years. We've filled it with our memories now... of birthday parties and recoveries from surgery, of budgerigars and baking, tears and laughs, arguments and hugs.

Chief of its blessings has been the view. We've had a bush-block out the back. Wallabies have come and eaten our lawn. Kookaburras have landed on our fence. Our budgie has been to visit the wrens out there (and returned), twice! That view has framed the seasons. It has been a place to escape, for walks and imaginings, and get-to-know-you conversations with new friends.

And now this has happened, you can see the before and after:



We knew it was coming. There had been talk for a while. The planning permission signs had gone up. But then it happened, and it happened quickly. As our children said, Mordor came to our windows, and we didn't want to open the curtains.

It is, for us, the epitome of a current season of endings. Significant school years are finishing. A child is turning eighteen. Ministry tasks concluded or handed on. *There is a time for everything*, it says in Ecclesiastes, *a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot*. This current season clearly is not a planting time, and it feels, literally, uprooted.

The task in all seasons is a step of honesty, and a step of faith:

We must be honest about what is happening. This is where we are at, and this is the season we are in. We must grieve what we need to grieve. There is a certain amount of emptiness to embrace. Planting season involves planning and prepping and dreaming for what might be. Growing time involves pruning and

caring and dealing with surprising things that have grown up at the same time. Harvest is busy busy busy with laughs and the promise of productivity-blessed rest. But this? This time of *conclusion*, how do we allow the fallow?

Which is where the faith step calls. For there are some temptations. It's very easy to wallow. It's very easy to scream and beat the air as things fall away (although that can sometimes be a very honest catharsis). A muddy despondency is close. But there is also:

1) Simplification. Trappings are gone. It's just the bare earth of life now, for a while. Oh Lord, what will you plant in us? For me, these are the days of reading, and pondering, and praying. There's some foundations down here somewhere, under the detritus of a decade's-worth of things-that-have-happened.

2) Approbation. A celebration, almost, but not in great parties that fade away, but in the fruit that has lasted the turn of the seasons. This fruit is people, relationships, and love. Unconditional, Jesus stuff. Things may come and things may go, but down here, under the ground, there's a treasure of great value – I know because I've *seen* it.

3) Contemplation. Not in some ethereal sense, but in the sense of looking ahead and contemplating "what's next?" Because this isn't the end. God-willing, there is much much more to come. And while this is not the season of striving, neither is it a season to batten the hatches and ignore the world. There are conversations to be had, surprises to be encountered, and possibilities to be cogitated upon. There's a path down here on this bare earth, there's somewhere to place and move my feet.

There *is* a season.

Turn.

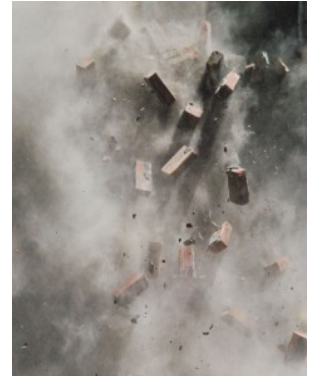
Turn.

TURN!

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# An Attempt to Grasp Emptiness

(Originally a facebook post, in response to a blog post from Mike Breen).



Is there a Lifeshape for kenosis\*?

“Emptiness” is fundamental to Christian spirituality. But it’s a slippery thing to grasp. It’s not figurative (or actual) self-flagellation. It’s an emptiness that comes when you’re in a place where you can’t just lead, you must also carry, and you realise that such a thing is beyond you. Your own fumes of strength are quickly burned away and you find yourself feeling something of the pain of God for his people, as well as a strengthening and a protection that is now utterly and totally and clearly from him alone.

You see it in the drama of Paul’s life whose apostolic burden had him “become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day” (1 Cor 4:13) and who even at the end of his fighting the good fight, described himself as being “poured out like a drink offering” (2 Tim 4:6). No wonder he taught the Philippians that song in 2:5-11!

To avoid pain and risk, is to avoid this emptying out. To fall into his arms in the midst of (seeming) failure,

disappointment, frustration, and ennui is the spiritual task. You can tell when a leader has passed through that fire... and when they haven't. And sometimes, when you get to the end of a season of rest and recovery, you long for it again, because in that dynamic emptiness you breathe His vigour and His life.

\* *kenosis*, from the Greek κενόω (kenōō), meaning "to empty"

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## Assurance for the Commuter

Another blessing from a random track selection on the drive to work.

*I don't know what this day will bring  
Will it be disappointing,  
filled with longed for things?  
I don't know what tomorrow  
holds  
Still I know, I can trust Your  
faithfulness*



*I don't know if these clouds mean rain  
If they do, will they pour down blessing or pain?  
I don't know what the future holds  
Still I know, I can trust Your faithfulness*

*Certain as the rivers reach the sea  
Certain as the sunrise in the east  
I can rest in Your faithfulness  
Surer than a mother's tender love  
Surer than the stars still shine above  
I can rest in Your faithfulness*

*I don't know how or when I'll die  
Will it be a thief, or will I have a chance to say goodbye?  
No, I don't know how much time is left  
But in the end, I will know Your faithfulness*

*When darkness overwhelms my soul  
When thoughts and storms of doubt  
Still I trust, You are always faithful  
Always faithful*

*Certain as the rivers reach the sea  
Certain as the sunrise in the east  
I can rest in Your faithfulness  
Surer than a mother's tender love  
Surer than the stars still shine above  
I can rest in Your faithfulness  
I can rest in Your faithfulness*

*I don't know what this day will bring  
Will it be disappointing, filled with longed for things?  
I don't know what tomorrow holds  
Still I know, I can trust Your faithfulness*

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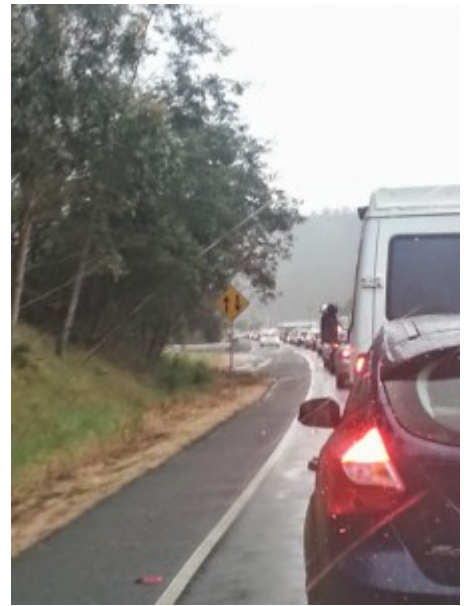
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## **Realised Eschatology for a Commuter**

My car audio is currently circulating through random songs from our music collection. Sometimes there's a gift in which

is contained, for a moment, the chief end of man.

*Lamp unto my feet  
Light unto my path  
It is You, Jesus  
It is You*



*This treasure that I hold  
More than finest gold  
It is You, Jesus  
It is You*

*With all my heart  
With all my soul  
I live to worship You  
And praise forevermore  
Praise forevermore*

*Lord, everyday  
I need You more  
On wings of Heaven, I will soar  
With You*

*This treasure that I hold  
More than finest gold  
It is You, Jesus  
It is You*

*With all my heart  
With all my soul*

*I live to worship You  
And praise forevermore  
Praise forevermore*

*Lord, everyday  
I need You more  
On wings of Heaven, I will soar  
With You*

*Lord, everyday  
I need You more  
On wings of Heaven, I will soar  
With You*

*You take my brokenness  
And call me to yourself  
There You stand  
Heal me in Your hand*

*You take my brokenness  
Call me to yourself  
There You stand  
Heal me in Your hand*

*With all my heart  
With all my soul  
I live to worship You  
And praise forevermore  
Praise forevermore*

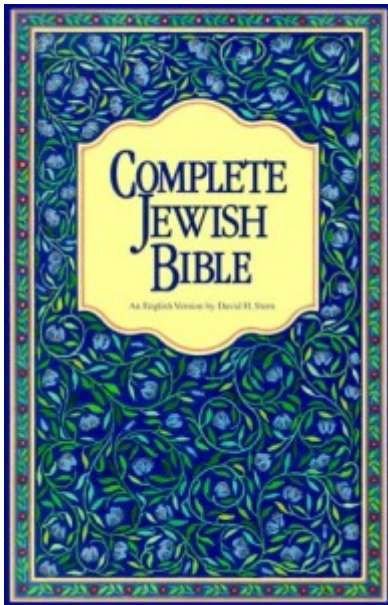
*Lord, everyday  
I need You more  
On wings of Heaven, I will soar  
With You*

*Lord, everyday  
I need You more  
On wings of Heaven, I will soar  
With You*



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# Review: The Complete Jewish Bible



I've just finished reading Matthew's Gospel in David H. Stern's Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), "An English Version of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) and *B'Rit Hadashah* (New Testament)." It's quite fascinating.

Stern's translation philosophy stems from a Messianic Judaism which seeks to emphasise the *unity* of Scripture. That is to say that the whole Bible is Jewish. In my short experience of the CJB I have noted that Stern expresses this in two ways:

**Firstly**, in his choice of vocabulary. This is clearly evident in that Hebrew transliterations are used for the names of people. Jesus is *Yeshua*. Peter is *Shi'mon*, or *Kefa* etc.

On top of this, certain key words and phrases are not translated into English but into Hebrew words which are intended to not only provided connecting threads between the Testaments, but also (I assume) towards a contemporary Jewish framework.

Consider, for example, the rendering of the Great Commission with keywords used for disciples (*talmidim*) and the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) and the more literal "immersing"

rather than “baptising.”

*Therefore, go and make people from all nations into **talmidim**, **immersing** them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the **Ruach HaKodesh**, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)*

**Secondly**, there is a covenant centrism.

For instance, the word “Hosanna” in the Triumphal Entry is rendered according to its semantics of deliverance. The crowd’s cry as Yeshua enters Jerusalem is shown to be an *exilic* one, a longing for a new exodus. I’m not convinced by the break down of the sentence structure here, but the sentiment encapsulates a covenant cry:

*The crowds ahead of him and behind shouted,*

***“Please! Deliver us!”***

*to the Son of David;*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of ADONAI!”*

*“You in the highest heaven! **Please! Deliver us!**” (Matthew 21:9)*

A deep correlation between blessing and *Torah* is evident:

*...and many people’s love will grow cold because of increased distance from **Torah**. (Matthew 24:12)*

*The Son of Man will send forth his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all the things that cause people to sin and all the people who are far from **Torah**; (Matthew 13:41)*

And in the “salt and light” exhortation of the Sermon on the Mount, the parallelism is exposed such that saltiness is

applied to *the* Land (a clear covenant connection with the Promised Land) and the light extends that blessing to the whole world (covenantal blessedness that is a blessing...)

*You are salt for **the** Land... You are light for the world.  
(Matthew 5:13,14)*

Finally, there is an eschatology that emphasises the gathering of the diaspora and the regeneration of the earth – a more grounded hope that stands against a modern tendency for escapism.

*Yeshua said to them, “Yes. I tell you that in the **regenerated world**, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Isra’el. (Matthew 19:28)*

*He will send out his angels with a great shofar and they will **gather together** his chosen people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:31)*

**General thoughts:** While there is a clear agenda in these translation choices (there always is!), for most of us it provides a positive de-hellenizing corrective. In my limited exposure I have certainly found it to be a refreshing and a deepening experience. I read Matthew using the Kindle version of the text. The vocabulary, together with understated chapter and verse markings, and a single-column layout, had me engaged in a way that I have not experienced for a long time.

I was introduced to the author and the text through a group of Christians who are drawing on Messianic Judaism as a means of enriching and expressing their faith. It is a worthy means.

There are also resonances with projects such as New Perspectives which seek to re-engage with the Jewish foundations of the New Testament. The CJB certainly aides in the push-back against the dilution of gospel to a mere

assuaging-the-conscience-of-the-individual.

Here is a coherent re-engagement in the pages of Scripture with covenant community and grounded eschatological hope. Here also, I believe, are the anchor points for an effective contemporary apologia, which is my own ongoing passion. But more on that some other time.