

# The Best Time Ever

By Rev. Daniel Paavola

**Opening:** Pray for the Lord's insights into your life and the opportunities for sharing the Gospel with those who are around you.

## What's Gathering Dust?

What have you started but have never quite finished? If you're anything like me, there are a few projects that you've begun, but they're now gathering some dust. Do you have any of these classics?

The closet that never quite got emptied and organized — or it did, and it's back to its old ways

The piano or the guitar that you started taking lessons on — or you used to play — but you haven't touched it for years

The garden that never got cleaned out last fall

The running shoes or the tennis racket that are hiding in the very back of the closet

Any of these is discouraging. More than one, and we can feel overwhelmed. But here's good news: None of these is hopeless, and some might be better now than ever.

The same is true about our chance of sharing the Gospel with those who know us. We might have to admit that we've let dust gather on some of our relationships. We might have gotten sadly out of tune with a few people. But consider how the Holy Spirit might use even these dusty moments to do His work of reaching people now at just the right time.

## Tennis Hasn't Changed — And Neither Has Your Sister

Every sport has new equipment — new rackets, shiny clubs, and flashy shoes. But I'm sure that old tennis racket of yours will still hit a tennis ball, even the ones rolling around in the back of the closet. My 1977 cross-country skis are ancient, but snow is still snow, and they glide along like they always did. I'll bet those trails you once loved are still there, and there's still a sidewalk in front of your house to walk on.

Just as all of these things are still here, so are those Jesus has in mind for us to approach. Consider three people in the Gospels who have endured illnesses over a decade. Read **Luke 8:43–48** (the woman with the bleeding for twelve years), **Luke 13:10–17** (the woman crippled for eighteen years), and **John 5:1–9** (the man paralyzed for thirty-eight years), and discuss the following:



How might it have been easy to assume that these illnesses were incurable and perhaps even the will of God for these people?

Why might God have delayed their healing until these meetings with Jesus?

Besides their healing, what other gifts came with both their waiting and healing?

Who in our lives are also still waiting, perhaps almost forgotten in the back of our closet of relationships, waiting for healing — spiritual or emotional?

## But You Weren't Going To Plant In The Winter Anyway

While your old walking shoes have been ready to go again anytime, your garden has seasons. True, it's no showplace now, and you could have done more cleaning last fall. But still, don't feel too badly. You weren't probably going to do much planting in January. In fact, January is the best month for many gardens as two feet of snow covers a multitude of gardening sins.

Read **John 4:1–26**, especially verses 13–18. Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well after she has had five husbands and now is living with a sixth man. Perhaps there is an intentional timing in His coming to her at this time. Discuss the following:

In order for this woman to appreciate the offer of Jesus, what might have been on her mind at this time in her life?

Why are we or others ready for change only after a certain time? How do you know it's the time for spring planting for someone?

Whom do you know that might be a garden in spring, a person who after a long, hard winter is ready just now to hear words of forgiveness, grace, and acceptance?

## Now The Ice Pack Can Go Back Into The Freezer

While your garden has its season, maybe so do you. There was a reason you stopped walking, running, or going to the gym. Your knee was killing you, and you spent too much time with that ice pack after every time you tried to work out. But you've been feeling better now, and it's time for long walks again.

Read **1 Kings 19:1–18**. Elijah has just had the tremendous victory of fire from heaven in chapter 18. Yet, when Jezebel threatens him, he retreats to the desert and is ready to die. God patiently waits out his despair but then redirects him to the task that is waiting. Discuss the following:

Why did Elijah crumple in spirit when threatened by Jezebel, even though he had just succeeded against the 450 prophets of Baal?

What did the time in the desert alone, the meeting with God, and the reminder that more than 7,000 others served God do for Elijah?

How might we be like Elijah at this moment, overwhelmed by the challenges against us?

However, how might this also be the moment when we are finally ready to return to the people that God has prepared for us to serve as His faithful witness to the Gospel?

## Now's The Time, And You're The One

So maybe things aren't so bad after all. Our heavenly Father has said His Word will not return to Him without accomplishing what He desires. It's not too late for us or those with whom Christ would have us share His love. In fact, this might be just the right time. Call up that old friend from school. Surprise your neighbor with a card on her birthday. Deliver that gift for the baby across the street, even though it's been a while since you bought it. Who's to say that this isn't just the time to begin a new round of showing Christ-like love, forgiveness, and grace? Blow the dust off and see what the Holy Spirit has prepared for just this time.

**Closing:** Pray to be able to recognize the opportunities of sharing the love of Jesus and the Gospel message that are especially ready now. Give thanks that God's timing is not ours and that He can use even the unlikely and dusty relationships that are around us.

*Former pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Butternut, Wisconsin, Rev. Daniel Paavola grew up on a dairy farm in New York Mills, Minnesota. He is a professor of theology at Concordia University Wisconsin, and holds a Ph.D. from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and a Master of Divinity from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Dan and his wife, Holly, have three children and live in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin. He serves as a speaker for the Women's Leadership Institute and enjoys motorcycling, restoring and driving a 1917 Model T Ford, woodworking, and running marathons.*