IN ALL SEASONS- Episode 1: Enjoying God's Grace in Every Season of Life

Welcome to **IN ALL SEASONS**. I'm Beverly Flanagan, a New Englander, married with children, stepchildren & grandchildren, a long time professional in health & human services, and a volunteer in parish ministry. Mostly I am a woman who loves the Lord, and is naturally & supernaturally becoming an elder. If you're a woman, like me, in the second half of life, wondering what it's all about now, and how to live wisely and age well, this podcast is meant for you!

First, what do I mean by **IN ALL SEASONS**? And by living wisely and aging well?

We Can Enjoy God's Grace in Every Season of Life

Years ago, the Lord Himself knit each one of us together in our mother's womb. He designed our hair and eye color, personality, and blood type. This is all in Psalm 139, a personal favorite of mine. He started our hearts beating. Best of all, He loved each one of us. He sang over us. Like all women, we flow from season to season throughout our lives. Each season has its own joys and sorrows. As we navigate through life, we can enjoy God's grace in every season.

What are these seasons of life? These are important stages in life, we all live through them, and as we mature, grow beyond them.

Girlhood, and Young Womanhood-- Promise & Possibility-- The Springtime of Life.

There's an idealism and an optimism to our early years. Even when circumstances in the family or environment is not the best, this is true. We believe that children are a gift from God and that they represent hope for the future. Brings to my mind a song my children sang in Sunday School--- don't worry, I'll try not to sing it.... "I am a promise. I am a possibility. I am a promise With a capital P. I am a great big bundle of potentiality. And I am learning to hear God's voice. And I am trying to make the right choices. I'm a promise to be anything He wants me to be." Anyone remember that, from VEGGIE TALES?

And then we have **Adulthood--** Singlehood, Career, Marriage, and Motherhood-- **Busy & Fruitful--** which is the **Summertime of Life.**

We have to figure out then what to DO with our lives, what work to do, whether to go to college or take up a trade. We fall in love & get married, have children, or we don't. We get married and things don't work out, we get divorced, maybe try again, and maybe yet again. There's always something to worry about, things to take care of- housing, yards, kids, jobs, bills to pay. As Christians, we try to focus on our relationship to God, what He wants of us, to contribute time, talent, & treasure to our faith communities, and so this too becomes something to worry about. Even though God doesn't want us to worry, we do.

It's in **Midlife** when the story of our true spiritual development begins in earnest; it is in midlife when we set down the foundation of the rest of our life. What came before our 40s was prelude; a preparation for our fantastic journey of inner growth & outer alignment with our truest beliefs & values, whatever they may be. This is a process that takes the rest of life and which advances spiritual authenticity; our quest for God at midlife. This is **The Autumn of Life.**

As we move into this season of empty nests, caring for aging parents, and enjoying friendship with our adult children, we can feel pulled in so many different directions during this time. Added to that there is the change of life and other ailments that strike. All in all, we can feel weariness attack to keep us from enjoying all the blessings God has put in our lives. We can enjoy God’s grace in finding rest in Him, rather than striving in our own strength. We can cast all anxiety on Him. Instead of carrying our burdens, we can lay them at His feet. Easier said than done, I know, but He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us and invites us to cast our cares on Him.

We are all living longer, and we have a much broader range of life possibilities than ever before. These two trends have come together to create an entirely new life stage that some professionals have called the **"Illumination Stage"** or aging gracefully stage of life. This stage begins in the mid 60s and extends well into the 70s, 80s and beyond. The premier event of the Illumination stage of life is a gradual shift of personal emphasis away from our functional ministerial/motherly/ work role to a more spiritually expressive role of new life meaning, and quickened spiritual intensity. In

other words, we become more sensitive to the spirit than ever.

Spiritual development in the Illumination stage drives us to new and exciting heights of heart, mind, and soul. The road is not an easy one. I can vouch for that myself, as I am increasingly aware that there is MORE behind than there is ahead, that time is running out. Indeed, the Illumination life stage can be the most difficult and yet the most rewarding stage. Physical diminishments and shifts in active involvement in the "busyness" of the world can promote spiritual growth, or it can overwhelm us. As someone who has worked with elders for years, and who is becoming one myself, I KNOW how true this statement can be. Spiritual growth comes from converting these potential threats into personal challenges that stir our spirit and propel us toward God. We seek answers the question: ***What does it mean to age gracefully?***

The Final Season
At the end of our lives, we are getting ready to go home to Jesus. Our lives have often been filled with beloved family and friends. Many have already gone before us, and we miss them. We have so many testimonies and memories of God's intervention and faithfulness in our lives. At this season, we can rest in His love and in simple childlike faith, trust Him to be close to us and lead us in the final days.

We can enjoy this Promise: ***"The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides in paths of righteousness for His Names' sake. Even though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23: 1-4).***

In Every Season, IN ALL SEASONS God is with us, loving us, wanting us to fully surrender, to trust Him. His grace is lavish, able to supply every need, able to meet us in our weakness, able to fill our hearts with joy!
So our questions are- IS SEEKING WISDOM A KEY TO POSITIVE AGING & A HAPPIER, HOLIER LIFE? AND WHERE DOES GRACE COME INTO IT?

What does the Bible say about aging? Aging in the Bible is said to be a sign of experience. The Lord promises His continuous love & concern for the elderly. ***"I will be your God throughout your lifetime--- until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you." Isaiah 46:4***

This podcast is about **LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL**.

What does it mean to LIVE WISELY? We go to God's Word & find our answers. Parts of the Bible are specifically called Wisdom Literature-- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs & Ecclesiastes are included by all traditions, while Wisdom & Sirach are regarded in some traditions to be of enough value to include them-- in the Apocrypha within the Anglican & Protestant Bible translations, and are included in Catholic Bibles.

The primary purpose of such literature is to teach Wisdom, not only to the young & inexperienced, ***"for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; [3] for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; [4] for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young"(Proverbs 1:2-4),*** but to also to the advanced***, "let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— [6] for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise (Proverbs 1:5-6)*** The repeated theme throughout Proverbs is that ***"the fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7)***

How do we AGE WELL?

Our key Scripture for **IN ALL SEASONS** is **"*Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom".* Psalm 90:12.**

In future episodes of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we will tackle these questions & talk about what this means, in the context of our lives as Christian women. I have much to talk about, in practical as well as spiritual terms. In this world where 'age-ism" is a real problem, seniors are frequently seen but not heard, increasingly marginalized, but that is NOT how our Lord sees His elder children. **OLDER LIVES MATTER, AS ALL LIVES MATTER** to the One who gave us Life!

Signing off for today, and thank you for joining me on **IN ALL SEASONS**!