

## **TIME AND THE RIVER**

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Like many of my friends, I have lost all sense of time. One day seems so much like the one before that I am frequently unsure what day of the week it is. This has led me to think about the angel's words in the book of Revelation that "there should be time no longer." (Revelation 10:6) It feels like that moment has arrived.

Usually, time seems to be individual segments strung together, like beads on a string; events distinguish one day from another and create their separate identity. But time is no longer like that. Now it is a continuous flow, unbroken, undifferentiated, somewhat like living in an endless present, which, a friend reminds me, is what many spiritual philosophies say we should strive to do.

This sense of a continuous unbroken flow reminds me of the image of a stream I wrote about earlier. Right now, it seems more like a river than a stream and that I am traveling in a canoe, moving quietly on the water, rather than floating on my back. The river moves continuously; it has its ebbs and flows, just as in my life there are periods of night and day, but those no longer seem to cut up time into segments any more than the ebbs and flows disturb the unbroken movement of the water.

The things I pass along the river's edge quickly fade from view; some are distinctive enough to remain in memory, while others fade away as soon as I've passed. Even the ones that stand out don't seem to be worth making an effort to remember because I know new and wonderful vistas lie ahead, and it is more enjoyable to look forward to those than to dwell on what's gone by and will never be seen again.

In some places, the river is narrow and the current swift; in others, like now, the river is wide and the current so slow as to be almost imperceptible. In those moments, it's best to relax and be content just to drift, taking the time to observe the world around me with more awareness than I usually do when my sense of passing time makes me rush by. Then I see, as I do now, pink blossoms on cherry trees and purple and red azaleas coming into bloom. I see white blossoms on dogwood trees and wide beds of golden yellow tulips at their base. I notice the sounds of the birds and hear them more distinctly in this moment when the world is more calm and still than usual.

This sense of traveling down a river as an analogy for my life makes me think about the river eventually coming to the ocean and my life eventually coming to its end. I can imagine coming around the last bend in the river after a long and sometimes arduous, sometimes peaceful journey, and suddenly seeing the broad limitless expanse of the ocean before me, sunlight sparkling off the waves. Its breathtaking beauty and vast scale would fill me with awe and joy. Truly it would be like coming into an ocean of boundless love, and I would quite comfortably paddle out into it, willing to be absorbed into its fullness. This image gives me a new perspective on the end of life, not as an end, but as an opening into the expansiveness of something new and wonderful.

The sentence that follows the one about time in the book of Revelation says that then, “the mystery of God should be finished.” (Revelation 10:7) I’m not sure what that means. But this new sense of time and the analogy of the river gives me a clearer sense of what that mystery means to me. In my earlier reflection, I said that God is the current of my life, and that’s how this continuous unbroken flow of time and the river makes me feel. Just as the current, coming from an unseen source, is the energy that keeps the river flowing, so God is the energy that keeps my life flowing—not just flowing, but also directing its course. I may never know the source of that energy any more than the source of the river’s current—that may always remain a mystery—but that doesn’t concern me. I can feel the reality of its power and its presence, and that is enough.